

Carnival by the Sea



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For Steve Green

Chapter 1

"SEA shells!" It was a harsh creaking voice over the sound of the waves. Bird voice, gull croak, cormorant, pelican, blasted by sand and salt, crying out from above; then the man's hardened bare feet thumped on the crazy wood of the boardwalk as he hurried towards the steps with the preternatural thievish greediness of a sea fowl.

"Wait there, Mister, wait there! Lemme show you the sea shells . . . sea shells . . ." The breakers rushed in against the beach, greysided and slick from the murky, fog-closed horizon. Ed Miller let the water wash up to his knees. Threaten to wet the rolled-up edge of his white duck pants. For a long time the young man had stood in the identical place and the water had heaped up cross-hatched sand around his ankles. A few yards from him the waves gurgled into a channel across the beach, under the forest of upright logs that supported the walk, into a concrete and later green tiled duct to be impounded in the "biggest swimming pool in the world."

"Mister, lemme show you the sea shells and . . ." The crashing water drowned his voice. Miller half turned and raised his arm to wave the other away; still the man advanced towards him bumping down the stairs, short-legged, odd gaited, floundered heavily and joyfully in the soft sand, he held up an enormous conch shell, astonishingly pink interioyed, outside white, turreted, gathered on a tropical beach, cast up by a distant sea, certainly not this. ". . . remember it by . . ."

The newcomer was short, almost dwarfish with a figure slight enough to be a child's. Thick grizzled hair made a fringe under a witch-like pointed hat that was tied under his bony, red-stubbed

chin. He wore a peculiar striped, rivas coat, a woman's cast-off beach garment, pyramid style with bell shaped sleeves, revers a brilliant yellow.

"Sea shells," he creaked. "All kinds a souvenirs. Come to Marty Noman." He splashed into the receding wave as freely as a water dog; once more held up the red mawed conch. "Listen, you can hear the sea in it."

Ed Miller looked down. The sheet of water, veined and blotched with foam swept dizzily away. It was bitter cold, sucking and pulling at his legs and feet that had long before lost any other sense of feeling. "Listen," Marty Noman was saying, "you can hear the sea in it."

His look was both shrewd and kindly. "You can hear the old one he'self. Listen!" Hopped up and down in the wet sand. He listened himself, smiling and round eyed with his head a little bent; his sleeves fell back from his skinny wrists as he held the shell with both hands against his head.

Behind him, white fronted wave mounted on wave advanced on the beach. Miller stared numbly into the imminent flood, dazzled in mind, his wits as senseless and waterlogged as his heels, only for a moment, then he stepped back and grabbing the other's arm pulled him with him.

But Marty Noman did not even turn his head. "Listen!" he shrieked. The piled-up water suddenly collapsed in a cross current and harmlessly poured away.

Miller took the offered shell.

"Put it to your ear and listen!"

He looked at it first, marine castle, white and red, sometime residence of the molluscos sea monarch. It was surprisingly heavy and large, large enough to accommodate a kitten. After a moment he mechanically lifted it to his ear.

Sea shell roar of the sea deafened him, the day crashed around him, grey fogged sky, moanings of the upright logs, shrieks above him and flappings of invisible birds; soaking, freezing spray blinded him and the massive wave hit him in the chest, he stag-

gered, half stumbled, gleeful waters poured into his mouth and nose; he rose shaking his head and spouting to discover his companion far up on the beach, quite dry, miraculously in possession of the great sea shell.

The wind, there was no wind in this still mist—the faint stirring of air as he walked up from the treacherous ocean chilled him through his sodden clothing; he began to shiver as he sat on the steps to put on his shoes.

Marty Noman at once came and sat down beside him. "Got soaked, didn't ya," he remarked. Miller kept a wrathful silence and the other began to whistle cheerfully through his teeth and then went on to say cosily, "Never you mind, the sun'll come out and warm ya up soon enough."

It was true, the fog was lifting, even as he spoke a filtering light came from the sky and the sea darkened and widened to its horizon.

"Miller," the other was saying, "Ed Miller."

Miller stared stonily directly ahead, he was determined not to show his surprise. "I ast 'em and that's what they tol' me your name was." He bent his head slyly and smiled. "I saw ya this morning come down here, and I saw ya yesterday and every day since ya been here . . . I was watchin'."

Now he drew up his knees and arranged the bright coat decorously to cover all but the tips of his toes, then he laid the great sea shell carefully on the steps. The polished, exotic object looked oddly forlorn and despised on the rough, weathered wood, and after a moment he picked it up and held it in his lap. He ran his finger slowly over the nacreous red.

"Funny 'er bein' red like that," he said at last. "You'd think the ocean'd come off blue in 'er wouldn't ya." There was a flat, rusty quality in his voice and the words came haltingly but rather loudly and without any particular emphasis like a child reading aloud from a primer.

It was clear that this was why he had come and not to sell sea shells and souvenirs. Indeed, he said so himself, "I wouldn't sell

'er for a million dollars, I wouldn't." He jiggled his knees under his coat and laughed. "Imagine anyone givin' old Marty Noman a million dollars! I wouldn't take it though, nosiree, not sellin' 'er, I wouldn't. Ed Miller, maybe you don't believe it."

The young man was anxious to go. Oh, it's easy enough to see that in a minute he'd get up and walk off, why he was soaking wet from the ducking he'd got, he'd want to go and change his clothes. He'd finished putting on his shoes, there was nothing to keep him here, only what old Marty Noman could think of saying to keep him here, words, that is, the old words that he'd used before, so often that he neither knew nor cared if the thoughts in them had meaning any more.

"An' it's funny the ocean goes on soundin' in 'er like it does, for ever I guess, showin' she came out of the sea once and that's the mark on 'er. And we all came outta her once. Everything in the world that's alive, that is . . . little dropsa' water that sorta broke off and started walkin' around."

He held out his hands, the palms turned ~~upwards~~ and the great loose sleeves fell back to his elbows showing the pale underpart of his arms with the veins standing out like cords, knotted and dark. "We got salt in our veins, Ed Miller, and salt in our sweat and salt in our tears."

The young man stood up. He kicked the sand and it came out a shooting cone behind his heels.

"Ed Miller!"

Marty Noman was a sly one, he'd been talking for years and years to those who didn't want to listen—who would listen to a dwarf of a man in a bright coat? "Ed Miller," he said, knowing full well that no man goes easily when his name is called; he scrambled to his feet himself, "It's natural, you know, wanting to go back . . . a person, a lotta people try . . . no, but it's few who can. . . ."

"Lookit your watch!"

The dwarf standing on the step, two steps higher than the young man still looking up to see his face, a baffled look, impa-

cient to go, but no longer angry as he had been, old Marty Noman had seen the anger and had talked it away and in spite of the impatience had talked him into staying, "Lookit you watch, Ed Miller."

So Ed Miller stretched out his arm and looked at the square, honest faced watch strapped to his wrist. The slender second hand swept its lordly circle.

"You kept your arm up, I saw ya Ed Miller, when you were in the water."

The sun was breaking through the swirling, milky mist, it made a pale checkered pattern on the sand and on the water; corporeal shapes broke off from the bank of fog and hurried seaward in the sudden wind. The young man covered his watch with his hand.

"Ed Miller," the voice was high and urgent, different from the other voices that he'd used, from the strident bird cry, sea shells, lemme show you, Mister, from the rusty recitation voice, new and high and weak, though the wind had brought his words from afar, saying, "Remember you kept your arm up, Ed Miller . . . I call you Ed Miller, young man, since that's the name you go under, that's the name they tol' me you call yourself."

His head tipped back, incredible sharpness and cunning in those grey eyes shaded by the fringe of hair that stuck out under the pointed, witch-like hat. "It's not your real name, is it?"

"No."

"I didn't think it was. You see, I took it right away that it wasn't." He looked without surprise as the young man with head bent ran bounding away dodging and leaping wildly over the strewings of driftwood, gained a further staircase, ran up to the boardwalk and disappeared.

Ed Miller walked along beside the shining sea laughing. Funny peculiar, funny ha ha, funny, funny, funny, laughing with his head thrown back; a rope of fog hung on the horizon, but the

choppy waves were sun touched now, swirls of sand that had blown up on the boardwalk danced in a breath of air, and a sign that said "Eats" jiggled and creaked over a closed up stand; below the water in the flume gurgled; he walked along breathless with running and laughter, finally leaned against the railing and the poor weatherbeaten, gimcrack buildings of the little resort tilted crazily against his rocking vision.

Miller, that outlandish stranger had said, it's not your real name, is it? Ha ha. I took it right away that it wasn't. So the young man who called himself Ed Miller ran away from him. (You're running away from the past, the ex-Mrs. Miller had said.) From a ludicrous man in a bright coat. So laugh, Ed. Miller. I call you Ed Miller, young man, since that's the name you go under. (Like any crook or fugitive who hides behind an alias.)

To hide—what's to be hidden. It's a laugh. You see if the truth be told everything is lily white. He squints at the white sand and says, that is the past. Snow white, white as milk; he frowns and wipes his lips on the salty back of his hand—white as salt. He is walking again along the boardwalk.

I'm sorry to say my past is absolutely blank. Not one blessed thing in it I want to remember, that's worth remembering, I mean. In other words it's an infernal bore. Why even an FBI man couldn't find a sweeter rose by any other name. The skeletons are all in order and dry as dust.

I'm Mr. Nobody, I'm Mr. Everyman. Seven holes in my head and a little white house to live in. A bigger white house than some had, but the difference is only in degree. The big white house was next door to a brown shingle house which was next door to a brick house, and they all had lawns and they all had privet hedges and long curving driveways and two-car garages, and our big white house had a little clump of birches at the side of the lawn while the Hudsons' next door had French lilac.

Middle class, white, Protestant, American, exorcising himself in the great colourless classifications. The Jungle Books and the Wizard of Oz, an Erector Set and a bike and a pal named Roddy

who died in the war. ~~Red~~ had a baseball that had been autographed by Babe Ruth, I had an air gun.

The name just happened not to be Miller and not to be Edward. That started, as a matter of fact, in a professional way. At least it sounded very professional to the fifteen-year-old to sign with a pen name the story that his high school teacher sent off to a magazine. It didn't come back. Instead, "Dear Mr. Miller: We all agree your story, 'Death and the Necklace' is first rate. We're keeping it for an all kids issue in Aug. Congratulations. The Editors." (He still has that letter around somewhere.) The magazine folded before August, but the name, Edward Miller, stuck. He used it on later stories and articles that did get printed and people began calling him Ed as a matter of course. Ed Miller didn't sound like a pen name—it sounded like a name a man might be born with.

His draft board called him Edward Miller too. In fact he was invited to report as two different people. Rejected, of course, both times. That ~~virago~~ who called herself his stepmother had managed to hit him so hard over the kidneys that he was maimed for life, though surely if she had had a little foresight she would have arranged to have him share and partake of the larger agony, the world's, not his own, to suffer and die on the green fields of Africa.

Instead, with his million dollar immunity, he could write his own ticket for about five years there. He regretted that she didn't know it, but there was no one to tell her that Ed Miller who was pulling down two hundred a week and her stepson were one and the same. At any rate, he, Ed Miller, stayed away from such as might have.

Ed Miller, the name, was all he took with him, when he cleared out for good, that and the clothes he was wearing and a bundle of letters from Maidie, his sweet sister Maidie whom they had managed to kill with neglect and casual unkindness. He hadn't even gone to her funeral—he didn't care how or where they buried her; he had watched her die, this sister was dearer to him than the

whole world, but he was out of the house, gone for good even before the doctors had finished pronouncing her dead.

He had never said goodbye to any of them but he had met his half-sister in the hall and he had said, 'Dissy, tell cook I won't be home for supper.'

"Maidie is dead!" The child knew it as well as he, though the doctors upstairs debated it. She was young and strange and very vulnerable.

So he had said, "No, she isn't. Not really. Dissy, walk with me to the corner and I'll buy you an ice cream cone."

She had only walked with him as far as the gate, then drew back. "I don't want any ice cream after all." She had turned before he knew what she was doing and darted into the rhododendrons that grew near the walk.

Ed Miller shrugged. That was that. That forever was that. Therefore he had neither sister nor half-sister and as Ed Miller he never had had, nor mother (even the mother he could not remember for she had died when he was very young) nor stepmother nor father.

Father, indeed. If one could be sufficiently detached the old man could be looked upon merely as a singularly misguided individual who had made a disastrous second marriage, bringing home a bride who was surpassingly pretty and surpassingly ill-equipped to deal with his two motherless children. (Or even when the time came, her own.) One could say that subsequently this man saw the error of his ways, but it was a long time later and by then the damage was done. He despaired of making any amends but he took himself off and found comfort in the arms of a third woman. This last, warm and good hearted but of very uncertain virtue, whom he would not have married even if he had been free to do so.

Admittedly, however, Ed Miller was neither objective nor dispassionate, and he bitterly despised the father whose very existence he had shuffled off with the name. It made no difference that he had died—word of it, long delayed, had reached Miller round

about and from a lawyer who also mentioned the third lady and her progeny. The young man had smiled cynically and remarked that it served the old bastard right. His sole surviving rightful son and heir did not, does not, and will never bear the honourable and glorious, the ancient and illustrious name. That instead descended to the three sons of a whore.

Oh supreme irony, oh blessed, and oh Biblical justice. For she was a Bible reading whore as we shall see. Old David wasn't served half so well. The fruit of the old man's lust certainly and perhaps of his loins—who knows the way of a man with a whore, and it's a wise father who knows his own children.

Not that he, Ed Miller, held it in the least against Miss Wilson. Antoinette Wilson, a professional name too, no doubt, and Antoinette at least was an honest tramp, and it was the old man who insisted that the children should be baptised in his name.

And in any case begotten by him or God knows who else, our honest Antoinette couldn't be expected to say, but by courtesy and for the sake of those innocents we may say begotten by him in his old age and christened solemnly Matthew and Mark and Luke. Leaving it a cause for wonder and conjecture, which it was, the sinner or the sinnee who slapped the names of the holy saints and gospel makers on the fruit of that unparticular womb.

What had become of the cruel stepmother, Ed Miller surely didn't know. He hoped certainly that she had gotten her desserts, still he could not have imagined a sufficient hell to punish her. The lawyer's letter about his father's death had given him certain bits of information. Her daughter suffered from an unspecified illness.

(Poor little Dissy had said, "I don't want any ice cream after all." He had only caught a glimpse of her face, white and thin and drawn, it was not the face of a little girl of eleven years old, he had seen the long bright hair streaming down her back as she ran into the rhododendrons and then he saw the bushes trembling slightly where she had passed.)

She suffered from illness. The lady herself was not too well and

her husband had cruelly cut her off in his will, or virtually that, leaving her merely the proceeds, during her lifetime or "until she remarry," of a twenty-thousand-dollar trust fund. She was suing, of course. She had managed to claim practically all the furniture as her own and not part of the estate, what she had done with it was anybody's guess. She was forced to live modestly, even in want (the lawyer must have been practising up on pathos for a jury) in an isolated town with a very curious, ironically apposite name. Ed Miller had never intended to go near her.

All this was of no importance, Ed Miller insisted, it was blank, it didn't exist. He was Ed Miller without history or lineage or collateral line, alone in the world to make his fortune. And he was doing all right. He was doing just fine. Except that when he was twenty-six years old he married a girl named Jeanne Sherwood who was nineteen and very beautiful and as far as he could see without a single fault.

She was of the sex and age that marries for love and does not look deeply into what she loves, but she possessed also loyalty and courage and compassion so that when knowledge came she loved on without stint or ceasing, desperately, even when it became apparent that this marriage could not and would not last.

It was his fault, of course, and his the entire burden of guilt. He became pale and wan and what had seemed to the girl a romantic sadness in the deepset eyes was merely sullenness and cynicism. He quit his job in order to write and he began to drink steadily and viciously and stubbornly to get drunk. In five years he had become an utter wreck and failure, he would say it himself with a curious satisfaction, to Jeanne while they listened to Handel and she pretended that all was well and in the eighteenth century. I am a little teapot short and stout, tip me up and pour me out. Martinis, silly, not tea. That's a prayer. Good tidings to Zion.

And the girl who was beautiful and had wanted to become an actress became still more beautiful and is on her way, so one hears, to become the wife of a banker and sportsman. Not however, until he, Ed Miller, had managed, because he really loved her, to

destroy ~~her~~ as much as he ~~was~~ able. By infidelities, of course, by cruelties of a subtler sort, ~~by~~ negligence, by selfishness, egotism, by the desperateness that ~~her~~ loving him engendered in him.

Then one day when it was all over she said to him, "Go and get help, Ed. I was too young and too foolish, I've tried and I've failed you, but go to some one who can help you, Ed. You can't spend the rest of your life running away from your past."

Crap.

If you have a past like I have God help you if you don't run like hell from it. That's the half-baked crud your banker and sportsman hands out, who got it from his analyst, because of course he goes to one, just the way he takes his absolutely perfect, healthy thirty-two teeth to the dentist to be cleaned regularly, twice a year.

There is nothing in my past, for your information, which was quite as stupid and irremediable and gruesome as my marriage to you. It wasn't a very nice thing to say, but it couldn't be helped. He could and did apologize. He took her in his arms and said it wasn't true, of course, what he had said, and he visioned himself spending the rest of his life clinging to her thus. But he released her.

"How's about a drink?" he asked her.

"No, thanks."

The girl watched her tall husband moving impatiently across the room, he got out two glasses anyway and went through the door that led to the closet kitchen. Angry. He was yanking savagely at the ice trays, "Goddamn it, Jeanne, why can't you ever defrost this goddam thing?"

She went to the silver drawer and got a knife to wedge under the tray. He was in a towering rage, furiousness and helplessness radiated from him like smoke. His hand flew up to his face. It lay over his eyes, shading them, trembling slightly, his light brown hair tumbled forward. Then after a moment he took the knife from her and managed to get the ice out, filled two glasses, poured in whiskey and tap water. They returned to the other room.

Although it was dark neither of them turned on the lamp, the only light came from the faded day and the filtered flickerings of passing traffic, the street lamps, the stop and go signal casting red then green in a rough triangle against the wall. The girl sat on the couch, the light played against her hair, her face was hidden in the shadows, she sipped the drink.

"Ed . . ."

Presently he said, "What?" to her.

They seemed as distant as two wanderers upon a desert who shout to each other across the sand in monosyllables. He closed his eyes and he could see the purple night rushing over the sand like a cloud.

"I . . ." she began.

"What . . . is . . . it?" slowly parted words.

"I only meant . . ." She still persisted. He sat stiff and cold and finally turned his attention away from her. He had thought that the worst that would ever happen to him had already come. But now this was worse. Her leaving was worse. He had loved her in a peculiar, inexpressive way, he was maimed and no more capable of loving than of fighting, yet loving even now when there was nothing between them except emptiness and pain.

"Maybe I drink a lot," he said suddenly, "but I never get drunk."

Anyway, she wanted to know too much. It wasn't any of her goddamn business.

"How about one on the house?" he asked.

"I haven't finished this one."

He mixed one for himself. "Baby," he said when he got back, "I suppose you'd like to know Mrs. Who you've been all these years."

"Yes." Even in the darkness and duskiness he could see her smile.

But he did not tell her then. He switched on the phonograph. Mozart's Posthorn serenade happened to be the top record, and he listened to the lovely sounds foolishly overcome. When she

was gone he would not listen to Mozart, it would be all tinkling and footlessness. He looked into the glass and the floating ice and watched her shadowy smiling face through the liquid.

"Astor," he said thoughtfully. He held the glass up to the light so that the street lamp shone through. "Astor, Mrs. Vincent Astor, Jr."

And then she was gone. Gone to the goddamn banker whom she didn't give a goddamn for but he was kind and understanding and if she didn't care for golf at least the green was pretty he supposed. He wouldn't know.

So a quickie divorce. Not in Reno, but for them that knows, this particular charity is to be had at home also and he sold a story to the *Readers' Digest* on the most unforgettable character he'd ever made up. His agent was responsible for that. A kindly old gal of fifty-three who made him rewrite the piece five times before she'd submit it. And it paid the bills.

Which is about all there is to Ed Miller except that he had decided to go to Mexico and he was on his way there to sit under the volcano like Malcolm Lowry's hero when three weeks before he had come to this ugliest of seaside towns, he had stopped wearily here beside the ocean unable to go any further.

At least he thought it was the weariness that kept him here. He was so tired when he got up in the morning that it was all he could do to drag himself out of his hotel room to go down to the beach to stand at the edge of the freezing waves. Also he was drinking quite heavily at the time. He would get cold on the beach and retire to the nearest bar that was open that time of year, and stay there until it was too late in the day to think of starting out.

Besides, he said, he liked the name of the town. "Carnival-by-the-Sea is a hell of a fine name for a town. It rings the bell," he told the various bartenders. "It sure rings the bell."

"It used to be called Oak Beach," they usually told him, "they changed the name."

"What's in a name," he'd say. "Damn good thing they changed

it. Why it'd be good to die in a place called Carnival-by-the-Sea, or go crazy, or commit murder or write a book or even get born in it. . . ." God knows what else he'd told them.

So he stayed.

He'd written a government post card to Jeanne. "I meant to call and say goodbye and things. Write if you will c/o Am Exp. in Mex. May stay here the rest of my life though. Hotel room at 3 dollars a day is worth 50 cents, still a hell of a lot cheaper than a psycho-ologist at 100 dollars a whack, and besides if worst comes to w. there's a boobie hatch a hundred miles further down. So don't be writing me how Dr. Billiondollaroff has done such a lot for Freddie. Love, etc. Ed."

Hell, the fog was rolling in again. He lifted his head listening to the solemn, primordial voice of the wrinkled, gathered ocean.

Goolick—the sound of the sea gulls, that half-formed primitive creaking noise, not a song nor a sign, the birds rose in the air on their perfect wings; beyond the shore were the sanctuary rocks, a phosphorescent glimmer in the night, by day, drab white stone speckled with the black bodies of roosting pelicans.

He was too weary even to think of dying, and as that loony Marty Noman had said he had kept his arm up so he wouldn't get his wrist watch wet. How adolescent can you get. He kicked at a ball of waste paper on the walk, thinking a drink would probably fix him up.

He squinted at the ugly permanent fixtures of the amusement park that had given the town its name and lay between it and the beach. Because of the season, it was boarded up and the giant swimming pool at its centre, a drained and stained, empty circumference, the water was damned in the channel. The place looked abandoned, most probably forever, though tattered posters promised an early opening.

If he could have cut through the park his way would have been much shorter, but as it was, he would have to go more than a half mile along the beach before he could turn down into the town. In the other direction, but closer, he remembered noticing a



small bar directly on the boardwalk. He hesitated, then turned and went back swiftly the way he had come. When he got opposite the place he had been on the beach he looked over the railing. There was no one there.

His shadow fell dimly on the sand for the sun still shone through the mist; in a moment that would have thickened making the light dull and diffuse and sourceless.

He had not heard his name, his "real" name spoken aloud in twelve years; there was a flight of little twittering birds, he could not have said what kind they were, in front of the breakers, but they vanished in a second.

Suddenly he was shouting out—he had cupped his hands around his mouth to make a megaphone—yelling into the deaf ocean, his name. "That's my name, d'ya hear!" The shrieked sounds rattled inside his head, in the ducts and in the bony canals, briefly on the damp air, pounded out in the surf. He called out twice more, the water below him crashed and hissed on the sand.

Then he was walking rapidly again up the boardwalk looking for the bar among the closed up hamburger and soft drink stands and curio stalls. To his right rose the great, gaunt bones of the loop-the-loop, "parachute" jump and ferris wheel, black-gray in the mist. He came to an old man mending nets and asked him the way. It was a little further up than he had remembered. Directed now he saw the neon sign at last, "O'Hara's Bar and Grill." The fog had extinguished the sun and the day was as white as milk.

He looked back up the boardwalk, and grinning sheepishly he pulled the sleeve of his jacket over his wristwatch. Then he went inside.

At the door he was met by a tremendous old woman burdened down with two huge paper bags and a tiny tow-headed boy literally clinging to her voluminous, mud coloured skirt.

"Eh, oheec," a grunt like that. "Who are you?" Her eyes peered at him suspiciously from between the two towering parcels.

"There, hang on tight and pull so I can feel it," to the child. The boy held a pretzel in his left hand, he touched it now doubtfully to his little red tongue, tipped his head and his shoulders and even his back way backwards while his gaze slipped by the huge belly of his grandmother up to Miller's face.

Gusts of alcohol and peppermint came out of the woman. She had discovered by now that she had never seen Miller before, that he really was a stranger, and she lost all interest in him. Her face rippled like a horse's knee that rids itself of a fly. "Come along, boy, we aint got all day, don't get your face dirty now, it's late already as it is, and the Missus'll be hollering her head off."

"Sorry you gotta go, Mrs. Tandy," said the bartender who was directly behind her, a watchful, pale man, who suddenly blushed as he spoke, added quickly and in confusion, "When you gotta go, you gotta go."

"Ohee, you can say that again, Jerry, and Friday's my busiest day." She swayed a little on legs as big as telephone poles ponderously getting underway, a box of soap flakes teetered at the top of the bag, the little boy, his head lowered now, skipped at her side as she pushed through the door to the boardwalk leaving the reek of her breath and body behind in the cramped little room.

The bartender was backing away to his place behind the counter with peculiar, jerky motions of unease of his head and shoulders. He rubbed his lips vigorously with his hand saying, "Well, what'll it be," sounds that came out muttered and meaningless. Apparently he wanted to be friendly but he was one of those unfortunate individuals who don't know how to start a conversation, so he retreated as far as possible from where Miller had sat down and half turned his back, continued massaging his mouth and cheeks and stared dolefully out the window as the enormous Mrs. Tandy loomed by at a microscopic pace.

"Bourbon," said Miller. "Bourbon and water. Better make it double, I guess."

Staring him in the face, meticulously if amateurishly lettered in careful capitals:

*O'Hara's Bar and Grill
O'Hara's Grill and Bar
If you ask for Credit
Our friendship it will Mar.*

Sweet Jesus. He frowned looking at the placard and wondered whether if he had been asking for a glass of milk he would have said, "Large, I guess." With that conscience-ridden self-consciousness of a man defying his conscience who defies it every day in his life and why the hell doesn't it get tired and quit—"I guess." For some reason it made him think of the lately lamented ex-Mrs. Edward Miller which gave him a royal pain. "Our friendship it will Mar."

The bartender at least was mercifully efficient about getting out the ice and water, but as he started to pour from the bottle he tried to say something affable like, "It's too bad the sun didn't stay out." The sentence died aborning, his hand trembled and spilled the whiskey on the counter. Foresightedly, his other hand held a white cloth and nervously wiped it up.

"Sorry, sorry, sir," he mumbled almost inaudibly, sweat in his distress stood out on his temples and he retreated in confusion with burning cheeks. In his fumbling moppings he moved the napkin server which revealed another little sign that noted, "The Management reserves the right to refuse to serve tee many martoonis."

Miller read it, raised his eyes and for a split second gazed into the other's winking blue ones, then the bartender turned away saying with tremendous effort, "Mrs. Tandy. She's a grand old gal."

Above the mirror in the same painstaking hand but now using a flourishing script was a jocose warning.

*If you check your hat with us
We'll watch it.
If you don't, watch it yourself
Because we'll try and snatch it.*

"Comes in here every day of her life to get her nip. Whiskey and lemon juice and sugar. Brings that kid along, Jackie, or the older one, Pug, you know."

"Does she now," said Miller with an irony he was sorry about a moment later. The unhappy bartender worked his mouth soundlessly open and closed, and the red that had suffused his face edged downwards into his neck. So Miller nodded kindly at a little tile set in the floor that proclaimed,

*Customers are reminded
Not to lie on the floor
If they do that
We can't serve them any more.*

"Who's the poet?"

"Oh . . ." The man's eyelids fluttered and a simpering smile struggled on his embarrassment-stiffened lips. Obviously he had written them himself but he said merely, "One of the partners."

A profound silence followed. Miller finished his drink and toyed with the idea of having another, he was also thinking about going back to his room at the Oceanside with its fine view of the garage, and idly tried to think what it was that Fitzgerald had said about a mind that can entertain two opposite ideas at once. He could go home to his fireside bright, a gas wall fixture in this case and the hotel keeper, Mrs. Belinda Fine, a gaunt, would-be bohemian creature of about forty-five, divorced, who wore a burnt orange bandanna Polish peasant-wise over her stringy black hair, and was more than willing, it was immediately obvious, to offer him all the comforts of home.

Whereas right here I can discuss the problems of Art with a Percy Bysshe Shelley. Yes indeedy, Art wins out over Woman. He signalled for another drink. "There's poetry in the bitter glass," he announced gloomily.

"Eh what?"

"I said . . . hell." He caught his reflection in the mirror behind

the bar. "I mean," he said heavily. "Whiskey puts a new complexion on things."

"Ah, yes, I've noticed myself. It puts things in a different light."

"Yes." He felt infinitely weary. He realised he didn't have the least desire to talk to the man, though the other apparently was warming up to the subject.

"You can put a more cheerful construction on things, with a couple of drinks under your belt."

"Yes."

The bartender had a kind face. No doubt he was a virtuous man. Miller had a professor once who used to quip, virtue is a female characteristic.

However, there are females and females, but he had never met a woman yet who didn't do exactly as she wouldst and do it holily. The particular one by calling herself his mother bolstered her position as holy of holies and therefore could be preternaturally evil and preternaturally sacrosanct about the whole thing; she could take out her vicious spleen on this helpless piece of manflesh, no kin to her by the grace of God, but another woman's son, therefore twice cursed (she was only doing her duty), and if he should burn in the seventh circle of hell he knew whose nasty mean little soul would follow him still.

"It's too bad kids can't get drunk," he remarked suddenly.

"What!" The bartender was genuinely shocked.

"Sometimes things are pretty tough for kids."

"But . . . well, we're not allowed to serve minors. . . ." The bartender dabbed at his forehead nervously with a white handkerchief.

"And I think it's a damn shame."

"But the law . . ."

"I think it's a lousy law."

"Well, maybe, Mister, only . . ." He wagged his head distressfully. Then he began to laugh. He refilled Miller's glass. "It's on the house," he said deprecatingly.

"Well, thanks. It's a pretty good house." He drank directly

from the shot glass savouring the bright metallic taste of the whiskey. "When I was a kid I ran away from home four different times."

The bartender nodded understandingly. "Things were pretty tough."

"Yeah, things were tough." The bartender, an absolute stranger had understood immediately, he knew everything. It was that easy to tell him.

Which had been what Jeanne had wanted to know with the infernal curiosity of Woman. They say I love you and therefore we mustn't have any secrets, *you* must tell me all *your* secrets. They say I love you, I love you, I love you, and even the most respectable of them expect purchase, bound, sealed, and delivered everything in the world for what they call love. Jeanne, Jeanne walking on the green. You can spoon feed that particular crud to your banker and sportsman friend in exchange for his bank and his golf clubbies. And welcome to it.

Abruptly he felt terrible. He said desperately, "You see there's no place a kid can go to run away to."

"I don't guess there is."

Miller drew a long breath. Christ the world was screwed up. He rested his head on his arm crooked against the counter. God-damn stupid to go to Mexico or anyplace or anything. Everything was stupid. He was stupid. In the back of his mind he could remember the old witch saying, "I think the boy is *stupid*." She had a peculiar voice as though underneath the ordinary tones of it there were thousands of little glass bells that were tinkling and breaking and crushing. He made a grimace. Oh Jeanne, Jeanne, I never told you about that voice. Don't you see, Baby, that voice! It was always that voice.

Then there were bells ringing, and a great crashing of gears. Miller shook his head startled; the bartender was at the cash register opening the drawer, he took from a hidden compartment behind the till a little scrap of paper. He unfolded it and placed it diffidently in front of Miller.

"Here's one that the guy just started this morning."

"Er . . . what? Oh!"

Written in pencil with as many erasures as words:

*You can't begin to learn to live
Until you learn to laugh.*

"Oh . . ."

"He just started it. It isn't finished yet."

"Ummm . . . oh . . ."

"It's not finished yet cause he just started it."

"Well, it sure is good. It's a real good beginning." Miller smiled and nodded his head. Then he held out his glass. There was something very nice about the bartender; in fact he was a wonderful guy, Miller thought suddenly. A goddamn good bar too, this place.

"Not much business, though."

"No, things are pretty slow in the afternoon." The bartender appeared to be a little more sure of himself at last. "I keep it open cause I'd be here anyways. I'm not much of a one to go wandering around. In fact, you'd be surprised. I haven't been on a vacation for five and a half years."

Miller didn't suppose he'd been out of this cramped hole in his entire life. Why sunlight and fresh air would kill him.

"And Mrs. Tandy, she always comes in."

"That the one with the kid?"

"Yeah, she comes here every day of her life."

Miller leaned forward on his elbows, he was aware of looking directly at the other's mouth and chin. "Say tell me about her, I'd like to hear more about her. You tell me about her!" God bless all strangers and the present moment, Miller was thinking. "You go on and tell me about Mrs. Tandy."

"Well . . ." The bartender smiled and poured himself a drink. "You see it's like this . . ."

Mrs. Tandy, no more at home on land than a whale, would come labouring along the boardwalk with enormous grunts and pantings. The fog rolled back and forth over her head and on the ocean side the sea dogs barked. In tow she had one or the other little boy, her grandson, Jackie or Pug; in she came through the door, sideways, always, because she was ever carrying burdens, laundry, groceries, huge bundles, as many as she could hold, sighing and groaning, "Hang on to my skirts, boy, and pull so's I can feel it," her hair hanging down in grizzly wisps from her forehead.

Lordy me, Jerry, I didn't think I'd make it today, the Missus was yakking about the parrot having bugs all morning, and those three dogs, they'll be the death of me yet, barkin' and yelpin' and carr'in' on. Fightin' too. Every day I go there I expect one or the other to be laid out dead. Why she keeps 'em it's beyond me, I'll never know.

Yes, make it the same, Jerry, same as usual, not too much lemon juice now. Man y'are the savin' of me. Boy, you sit there and be good Ganny'll give you a nice cookie. Here, Jerry, give me one of these pretzel things.

And Lordy me, that Pinkie she got a foxtail in her paw, and what was I to do but drop everything right then and there and tend to that pesky animal. Oh you never heard such howlin's and goin's on. And Mrs. Tandy this and Mrs. Tandy that. I swear I don't know why I keep on stayin' at such a place. I get pains in my legs just thinking about the running around I do. Only I feel sorry for her, I do, her in a wheelchair and absolutely helpless till you come by and give her a hand.

Oh, she's hard to get along with, you can bet your sweet life. Nobody but Annie Tandy would put up with the likes of her. Mrs. Tandy this and Mrs. Tandy that. Always pesky and tetchy, always finnickin' around, "Mrs. Tandy, the carrots are burnt." "They stuck to the pot a little, but they're not the least bit burnt." "I say they're burnt. And Mrs. Tandy, you forgot to clean out Mr. Poco's cage." "I cleaned it out as clean as a whistle and he

must have messed it up hisself." "Mrs. Tandy, Mrs. Tandy, Pug's teasing the parrot." "Pug, you come away from there this minute." "I'm just teaching him to talk, Ganny." "That parrot don't need to talk none, Pug, and you go outside and wait for me."

And you know that parrot, Mrs. Tandy, Mrs. Tandy, he's picked it up from her. I was clear outside in the yard hanging up clothes and "Mrs. Tandy, Mrs. Tandy" I hear him calling, and how'm I to know it's that pesky parrot creature. Right away I drop what I'm doing and run in the house, "Mrs. Tandy, Mrs. Tandy," like the place had caught fire. And the dogs are yelping and barking as usual, maybe it's those two big police dogs killin' off Pinkie, I wouldn't be surprised and I wouldn't be sorry, believe you me, "Mrs. Tandy, Mrs. Tandy," and in I go.

"It's Mr. Poco," she says.

"What's the matter with Mr. Poco?"

He's sittin' up as spry as can be looking at me out of those queery red eyes of his. "What's the matter with Mr. Poco that can't wait till I've finished hanging out the clothes, will you tell me that?"

"Why it's Mr. Poco who was calling you. He's learned to imitate me."

And she's laughing her head off like she's gone fool crazy.

"You heard him and you came all the way in 'cause you thought it was me. Oh Mr. Poco, you fooled Mrs. Tandy all right."

Well I'm tellin' you I could have wrung that bird's neck right then and there. But there was the Missus jes laughin' her head off and tears rollin' down her cheeks she thought it was so funny.

"But Mrs. Tandy, now that you're here you might take Spot out for a walk. I think Spot maybe wants to go out for a walk, and make sure that she does everything because I don't want her wanting to go out right away again."

And I swear I don't get a minute's peace no more. "Mrs. Tandy, Mrs. Tandy." And some of the times when I'm sure it's jest Mr. Poco and I don't go in, I hear her calling me too and then she bawls me out and says didn't I hear her calling and calling and

why didn' I come. And some of the times I wager you she calls me herself and says, "Oh Mrs. Tandy, I'm sorry but I didn't call, it must have been Mr. Poco." And she laughs herself silly.

So help me God, I don't think there's a person in the whole wide world as would put up with what old Annie Tandy puts up with. My boy, he says to me, "Mother, why'nt you jes rest an take things easy for yourself." And God knows it I have it coming. I've worked hard all my life and now that I'm old I deserve to slow down and jes take things easy a bit like he says, but I says to him, "John Everett, who's gonna look after the old Missus iffen I didn'?"

Jerry, I'm tellin' you, I'm bigger than most everybody there is in most every direction around, and I reckon my heart must be biggern most too. That's the only explanation.

Yes, a wee bit more, Jerry, now not too much lemon juice, ah, that's just right. Puts life in the old bones. You sit still, Pug, (or Jackie) we'll be going soon enough. Here's another cookie for ya. Oh, you haven't finished the one you have. Here eat it up quick and Ganny'll give you another.

But I'm tellin' you Jerry, I feel sorry for the Missus. She's pesky and all that, you know, but there she is helpless as a babe almost, all alone in the world with nobody to tend her but me.

And you know what, Jerry, time was when she was real rich. Like a millionaire or something. You ought to see the stuff she's got, clothes, trunks and trunks full of them, all kinds of clothes, dresses and coats and suits and furs, some of those furs might be valuable only they're pretty old, and shoes, she's got about three trunks just full of shoes and nothing else and some of them have only been worn maybe a couple of times. Hats, scarves, gloves, everything you can think of, she's got millions of them stowed away.

And furniture. The place is stuffed with it. There are a lotta rooms we don't ever open up at all, they're just chuck full so you can't get in with crates and boxes, Lordy knows what's in them. Dishes, there are barrels of them. And I can't even begin to tell

you about all the furniture that she's got piled in that big front room that she stays in. I say, "Missus, whatdya want it all for?"

"It's very beautiful and valuable, Mrs. Tandy."

"Maybe so, but that don't answer my question, Missus."

But that's all she'll ever say, Jerry. Then she'll look sad and start gazing out the window. Oh, she's fallen on hard times, she has, and so you gotta feel sorry for her. I reckon having all that stuff around reminds her of how it was in the old days when she was rich.

You know, Jerry, there's some that say it's better to be rich when you're young still and can enjoy it, only I don't know. Cause when you get used to nice things you feel worst about not having them than if you didn't ever have them. Look at you and I, Jerry, we aint' never been rich, and we're used to what we're used to. But the Missus, she isn't. If she wants an egg she wants it just so and she's miserable if it isn't served fancy. And I can't say as I blame her, it's what she was used to.

Pug (or Jackie) now, just a minute more, Lordy knows it's gettin' late and I gotta be going. Yes, Pug (or Jackie), you can go stand in the window, but don't you be breathin' against the glass and cloudin' it up. Sometimes you see her just sittin' there, not reading or anything, quiet as can be with a faraway look in her eyes, thinking about the old days, I'll wager you my life, thinking about how things used to be. A real sad look on her face, it tears the heart out of you. Not that she's one to complain about that; she'll drive me crazy pesterin' me about this and pesterin' about that, but she don't complain about what's the Lord's will. She don't say a word about that, and you gotta hand it to her for that.

And you know what, Jerry, the other day she says to me, "Mrs. Tandy, I've been worryin' about what's gonna happen to Spot and Shep and Pinkie and Mr. Poco. When my time comes, what's gonna happen to them?" "Don't you worry, none, Missus," I told her. "They'll get along all right." "I don't know," she says, "they're just poor dumb animals, but I couldn't die easy for worryin' about what'd happen to them." "Don't be worryin'

about dyin'," I says. "It's a long ways off for both of us." "It's not for me, myself, I'm worryin'," she says, "it's the responsibilities and obligations I have. Why, if I died, I'd feel like I was failing them, you know, even though they're just poor dumb creatures." "I know what you mean, Missus, but don't you worry none." But, doncha see, Jerry, it shows what a kind heart she's got. In a way, dyin' would be a mercy. Not a minute of her life but she's not sufferin' aches and pains. Why I've seen her in her sleep crying out and moaning. And it's not the little ordinary aches and pains as it's human nature to have. Why me, I ache here and I ache there, but not so bad that I can't forget it. But her, I'll go in to her and she'll be as white as a worm under a stone, just from pain and her mouth screwed up funny. Why I don't know how she bears it, but next thing you know she'll be laughing about Mr. Poco callin' me in from outside or something one of the dogs has done.

Well, Jerry, I gotta be going along now. What do I owe you? (Always the exact same amount.) Cheap at the price, Jerry. I don't know what you can buy, Jerry, that's half so good as what you sell. Oh Pug (or Jackie) you breathed on the window and messed it up with your fingers. What's that you say? That ain't no picture of a man, and the window's no place to draw one. Jerry, give me a rag and I'll mop it up. I didn't bring up my children like John's Edna does, if it was one of my own I'd give him a wop on the head. No, it don't really matter like you say. Come along Pug (or Jackie) hang on to my skirt and pull so's I can feel it.

And off she goes, how she manages to get through the doors is always a wonder, and out down the walk with the fog swirling and the gulls shrieking over her old grey head, tottering along slow on legs as thick as telephone poles, the big bundles in her arms—all she can possibly carry—and one or the other, Jackie or Pug, hanging on to her skirt; down the narrow sandy street to where she stays with her son and his family, or up the path towards the cliff, towards the weird, monstrous structure that rises out of the white dunes, a huge shape, fantastic beyond belief where the old Missus lives, crippled and abandoned, alone, with

for company the two thoroughbred Belgian shepherd dogs, the white mongrel terrier and the ancient green parrot drowning the sound of the northern ocean in harsh jungle shrieks, "Mrs. Tandy, Mrs. Tandy!"

Miller was staring fixedly at the bartender. He was only half listening; sometimes his entire attention was taken up by merely the sight of that pale, pasty, shy face; a furze of spiny yellow hairs growing out of a wasteland of shining, domed scalp, two pale eyes fastened upon his own as though they drew strength from that very fact while the man poured out a story (oh yes, I told him to tell me a story . . .). Then Miller would look away uneasily.

The sun had come out again and it had a strange effect in the room. It was shining brazenly on the sea, slanted under the high bank of fog, so that the outdoors had the quality of a ceilinged room whereas here in the bar, the mirrors took Edward Miller, Jerry, bottles, counter, stools and all outside into the middle of an ocean that had its bright horizon in every direction, wherever one looked.

Miller hadn't noticed the mirrors before, perhaps because their reflection had been so dark and dreary, but now it became impossible for him to see anything else than these thousands of repeated seascapes. In the very glass he drank from was the blue Of The Wine Dark Sea. Far out a boat almost at the horizon with a trail of puffy grey smoke moved imperceptibly as the hour hand of a clock. For a long time he had watched it and it had moved but he hadn't seen it move.

He winked his blinded eyes and saw an image of a purple sun, too bright, this room, as though kindled into flames.

"Well," he said. "Well, that's quite a yarn."

"What?"

Could be he'd talked out of turn. Oh what of it, our friend Jerry here probably knows I'm very drunk indeed. Which is

nothing to be ashamed of. Unless he's too potted himself to notice it.

Suddenly Miller raised his hand and brought it down hard on the counter. "All I've got to say is that this is the goddamndest town I've ever heard of."

"What's that?"

Miller gave the astonished bartender a sly and crafty look. "I've heard of it before, too, see!"

Then he noticed that he was no longer the only customer here. In fact the room was full of people. Well, I gotta go, he said. But he was not certain whether he had said it aloud or not. There was a young man standing next to him, about his own age, drinking beer, who had his back turned towards him. Also an old man on his other side who was talking to Jerry.

"Say, Jerry!"

"One moment, sir." The bastard. The voice was ringing in his ears, the voice that sounded like ten thousand pieces of glass and crystal being crushed together was taunting him. "Oh now he's sniveling. I never saw such a crybaby. He's a coward. He's stupid and vicious and greedy and dirty and selfish and lazy, and he's yellow through and through. I shudder to think what will become of him."

"Say, bartender!"

"Yes, sir?"

"My check."

"Yes, sir."

Everything was spoiled. Goddamn, rotten putrid spoiled.

He was vaguely walking along in the sunshine and anyway there was only one sea now, in one direction, and roaring loud in his ears, slapping on the beach and flowing away again, hissing. He leaned against the railing and smelled the salt. Christ, he was drunk as a skunk and then some.

Think you're gonna get me down there and give me a soaking, doncha, old man ocean. But ya got another think coming. I gotta go now, bye bye Mr. Ocean, see ya around some time, see ya,

see ya, pretty goddamn good that, goddamn A B C ya. Then he shook his finger at the ocean, "Now doncha forget what I tol' ya, an' doncha tell anybody, hear."

He took a deep breath, the infinite weariness had descended upon him once more. "Well, if anything happens it's just plain Mr. Edward Miller, leastaways."

"What did you do, fall in?" asked Belinda Fine.

The hotelkeeper was sprawled on a deck chair clad entirely in slacks. No, the top part was a sweater dyed to match, real close fitting showing clearly where her bra began and where it left off. Strange, he wouldn't have thought she was the kind to bother to wear anything underneath.

"My dear good lady, if one cannot drink like a gentleman, one should not drink at all. And that is a moral tenet expounded to me by the scion of an FFV, a son, indeed, of Tidewater Virginia—a place, not a person, and that is the sole contribution to philosophy of our little brothers to the south of the Mason Dixon line, if we accept the sanctity of Southern Womanhood which to my certain knowledge and understanding is not so sanctuary much, if you will pardon the expression."

Belinda laughed obliquely, "Youall don't understand. I was merely remarking on the salt on the suit."

"Ah yes. The ocean thought I was a little bird and put a little salt on my tail. But I don't mean anything personal by that, I hasten to add."

"Oh no indeedy."

"Still and all, being a bird in the hand is worth more than being one of two in the bush, if the hand be so fair and white as yours, lady. But I am interrupting you, you are reading."

The last showed rather remarkable powers of observation. When Mrs. Fine set herself out on the glassed-in front porch to read, the book was the least of her equipment which included an enormous standing ash tray so monstrous that it could only have

been stolen from a men's club, a bottle of beer—empties from previous sessions crowded the floor—a carton of cigarettes, some mending, in case she decided she'd rather do that, some knitting, a pile of magazines and newspapers, nail polish and Kleenex, extra wraps and a box of fig newtons.

"What book is it?"

"*The Mature Mind* by Overstreet."

"An excellent book and an excellent Harry. Fair maiden, are you partial to Harries? One touch of Harry in the night as one bard said to the other. A mature mind, the finest gift, a man can bequeath his son, not to mention his daughter, and if the world were full of mature minds we should all be happy, healthy and kind."

"Seriously, have you read it?"

"Seriously, I have not read it."

"Seriously, why don't you read it? I think you'd like it."

"Seriously, I will, Madam. Your slightest word is law. But not now, Madam." He sat down on a wicker chair, he had begun to find himself boring in Belinda's company. A fine tomato and all that but perhaps our salad days are o'er. Women in slacks are better in shacks. "I am thinking of becoming a poet."

"Get yourself a beer out of the ice box."

"Nay, nay. All you young people think about nowadays is drink. And Worse."

"Oh come off it."

"I most humbly beg your pardon, Belinda Fine." Ugh, he was distinctly dull.

"Say, I gotta go in the house a minute. Can I get you a beer? Or something better?"

Take care Edward Miller, she would ply you with liquor. "No, thanks, I was just going for a walk." He stood up.

"You're a mess. Go take a bath and change your clothes."

We're getting mighty personal, aren't we, Belinda Fine. "Well, I'd rather that people just liked me for myself."

"Oh you," she said smiling good naturedly. "See ya around."

“Yes. Ta ta.”

He drifted down the primrose path. What no primroses? Well tired looking petunias he guessed they were and weeds. Belinda Fine distinctly did not have a green thumb. In fact there was nothing green about her at all. He turned at the gate and looked back. She was still standing on the porch, she waved at him and then went into the house and impatiently shut the door.

Patience, Belinda Fine. Patience is the soul of virtue, and the soul of unvirtue also.

He was walking along the boardwalk again beside the sounding sea. And all I ask is a tall ship and a star to steer her by. For which he was made poet laureate of England. And I have heard the mermaids calling each to each, and he likewise is greatly overrated, though it must be said that I did greatly fancy that dear dead world in my teens at five o'clock in the morning. Belinda Fine, I wager you, belongs to the Book-of-the-Month Club and the Book Find Club and the Literary Guild, and a rose is a rose not excluding Ernest Hemingway and I don't give a damn about literature really, the cry of one small child is more tragic far than Euripides' Medea.

A small boy was bawling his head off. Trotting along as a child will with tears flowing down his cheeks and his eyes screwed up almost to sightlessness, emitting roars of anger and sorrow and hanging on for dear life to his grandmother's skirt, for of course it was Jackie again, or Pug, probably Jackie since he was so young, and the enormous Mrs. Tandy who toiled along with bundles still, not grocery bags this time but tied up parcels, and never a sign on her big, kindly face that she heard or cared for the child's yells.

On inspiration Miller waited till they came abreast then he reached out and patted that tow coloured head, solemnly, “Son, what sorrow?” The boy hushed himself as quick as a cricket and hid his face.

The grandmother peered at Miller suspiciously just as before from the valley between her towering bundles, "Eh, oheee, who are you?"

He couldn't help but laugh. He bowed. "Good evening, Mrs. Tandy."

Her eyebrows shot up almost to her hair line but by that time Miller was striding rapidly away. "Eh, what a strange young man. Lor', Pug, wasn't he a funny one! Oheee, good enough, the child's laid off his hollerin', there's that to be said for him and he knows my name, that he did, sayin', 'Good evening, Mrs. Tandy,' he did, and didn' know him from Adam. Lor', Jackie, I was meaning to say, but wasn't he a funny young man! Hang on to my skirts, boy, and pull so's I can feel it. Look like he'd been washed up by the ocean, he did. Did you notice the salt, boy, white on his jacket, for all the world like he'd been washed up by the sea, and he knew my name, he did, I'll say that for him."

At the end of the boardwalk there was a flight of steps and then a winding path full of the pointed cones of trampled sand that led in and out the dunes and up the beach.

The town of Carnival-by-the-Sea possessed in addition to its outsized amusement park a great many peculiar buildings, they were scattered all over, some on the main street, others in out-lying districts. They were generally two or three stories high and stood alone with little fence-enclosed yards; their shapes corresponded to their supposed function. Thus an enormous building made out of glass housed a restaurant called The Fish Bowl, a frankfurter twice the size of a railroad car was a dispensary for hot dogs; fruit drinks were sold in an orange globe that was twenty-five feet in diameter; a dairy was shaped like a milk bottle, and a shoe repair shop like a boot; the prow of an ocean liner (The Grog Shoppe) pointed towards a giant windmill (The Dutch Maid); The Indian Chief Dance Pavilion was a stuccoed brick tepee and the Honey Shoppe was a hive.

One of the most ambitious structures was a coffee pot that was five stories high. It was shaped like an old-fashioned percolator with a glass roof, a handle which served no purpose save versimilitude, and a spout that gave off real smoke since it doubled as a chimney. Although it was made out of wood it was painted with bright silver paint to look like aluminium; the windows, and there were a great many, were bowed so as not to spoil the line which was spoiled anyway by the addition of a rather large porch and a long, steep flight of steps up to the front door made necessary by the fact that the structure was built into the side of a hill.

Whoever it was that put this one up, however, was bound to be disappointed. The town expanded in the opposite direction and the boardwalk never came closer than a half mile of it. Moreover the owners had never been able to gain the right of way that would have made it accessible to the highway nearby. Thus this marvel and wonder is functionless in the dunes alone, surrounded by the shifting sands.

Ed Miller stood below staring up at this weird structure; the sun gleamed on its silver sides, tremendous, overwhelming it leaned towards his sight. His eyes were blinded by the metallic shine, by the sun setting swirled in fiery mists. The ocean made a great sound. He picked up a sea dollar on the beach with its five pointed star etching and crushed it in his hand. The building towered over him and the evening mists hurried over the sky, blinding light of the sinking sun, hurrying gulls, awk awk sounds, the ocean riding up on its shores, the building rose up on a cairn of monumental rocks, rose up in a diminishing cone, the silver turned to black against the light, the fog rushed in, no longer white, reddened in the setting light, wash, the sound of the waves.

"Young man, young man!"

For the place is not abandoned, there is a ghost who lives in the coffee pot. Black coffee brew of the devil, a ghost who calls out in a cracked, old woman's voice, "Young man, young man!"

"Young man, young man!"

Parrot screech, "Young man, young man!"

Ghost human voice, "Young man, young man!"

Then barking dogs, yelps, squeals, growlings. Wordless parrot screams. She was hidden, the witch who sat there. Black witch clothed in black, ghost crying out, "Young man, young man!"

The dogs howled and the parrot squawked insane, "Polly, Polly, Polly."

Then he was holding a leash in his hand, pulled forward by an enormous black wolf-like dog. "See that she does everything," screamed the voice from above. "Make sure that she does everything."

"Polly, Polly, Polly, Polly!"

Barkings and yelpings.

The black beast squatted in the sand.

"Young man, young man, walk her to the gate!" To the post box, RFD. He drew the letter out. Wild, disordered lettering of the superscription that covered the entire envelope, mad, insane, but clear enough the name, Mrs. Jessica Albany, that was clear enough to read in the wan, miasmic light.

"I know you, Mrs. Albany."

"No," she said, she looked at the envelope once. "I don't want it, kindly throw it away."

"I know you, Mrs. Albany."

"Throw it away, if you please, I don't care to read it."

"I know you, Mrs. Albany. We have met before."

"No," she said. "Thank you very much, young man. Here's fifty cents for you."

The coin she handed him was as hot as fire. "I know you, Mrs. Albany. My name is David Albany. Is. Was. David Albany."

"Thank you very much, young man. No, I don't care to read the letter. It's too much for me, now I cannot walk . . . the dogs . . . but I thank you very much. No, David Albany. I don't know what's become of him. I think he's changed his name, but I don't know what's become of him. But thank you very much."

"I am David Albany, Madam."

"No, but thank you very much."

"Goodbye, Mrs. Albany."

"Goodbye, young man."

"We shall meet again, Mrs. Albany."

"I hope so, young man, goodbye, thank you, young man, again."

The sun did not set on sea or land that night, it lost itself in the black fog, and he made his way back, groping in the darkness, foundering in the soft sand, guided by the deep tolling voice, the sound of the invisible sea.

Miller sat on a bench in the glaring white arc of light shed by one of the high streetlamps set at intervals along the boardwalk. It is desperately cold and his teeth rattle in his head, he hunches over the fat envelope on his knees. Sometimes he puts his hand over it and then stares straight ahead at the worn, uneven flooring of the walk. The boards are set in diagonals and he cannot look at them for long without it making his head spin. He takes away his hand and looks at the envelope.

The fat letter he had retrieved for no reason at all from the mailbox to give to the old woman who had asked him to walk her dog, to give to Mrs. Jessica Albany who had yoked him to a wolf, who had only glanced at the envelope and said, "No, I don't want it. Kindly throw it away." It was lying in his lap.

Inevitably he would read it.

It would be much simpler really to throw it away in the nearest litter basket and then go sensibly back to the hotel and get a good night's rest so he could get up and get going early in the morning. Hell, he could call off the trip to Mexico and go back where he belonged. He could get there tomorrow, no Sunday, and start working on Monday. He could even go to Jeanne and say, All right, here I am. I'll go to your goddamn psychoanalyst doctor, whatever you want and we can live happily ever after.

He stared at the diagonal lines. When he looked long enough they began to waver and weave. They looked like isotherms, iso-

bars, whatever they are that they draw on weather maps over the continents, over all the continents, maybe the continents on another planet, Mars or Venus, continents, continence, which is, no doubt, what ails a body.

But the letter in his lap, if nothing else, proved his experience.

He would read it, inevitably.

To read that letter, to become a spy, a private dick, a snoop housemaid, to join, in short, that number that no man in his right mind would number of pryers and peepers who read letters addressed to other people, however, my children it is a convenient way, is it not, to bring us up to date, since I have neither seen nor heard about this particular wretch for nigh on twelve years. Twelve years! He nodded with satisfaction. Twelve years, that is aside from my lawyers to the effect that she was trying to lay hands on my inheritance.

He held the envelope in his flat palm as though he weighed it. Inch high letters scrawled out, "Mrs. Jessica Albany." The return address printed in the corner was that of a mental institution.

He felt as though his own identity were breaking up, crumbling, disintegrating. It was the whiskey, his betrayer, treacherous friend of his weakness and fear, this had overwhelmed him and made him sweat now in the bitter cold. This letter that he held in his hand was his own—he'd written it himself, in madness and extremity, he'd lettered out the enormous scrawl, "Jessica Albany." Burn it, destroy it, erase this evidence against him. He took a book of matches from his pocket and with trembling hands began to try to light one.

But the fit passed, finished, leaving him weak and trembling, but sober and himself once more. He smiled a little and held the letter up, balanced it on top of his extended fingers as a waiter does a laden tray, with his other hand he groped for his pocket and slipped the matches in.

It had given him a turn. My God, it gives you a turn, to have your past come up and slap you in the face, and it gives you a turn, moreover, not to be certain that it's not the future. Too bad

Jeanne's not here, it'd make her laugh her head off. And so, my children, this is the way the story ends. Jeanne, though, never used to finish books if they had a sad ending because they made her cry.

Maidie, if I recall correctly, didn't either. My poor little sister who never had one tear for her own griefs weeping her head off for Uncle Tom and Black Beauty and Anna Karenina and Emma Bovary, touched by every suffering real or imaginary so long as it wasn't her own.

And that poor child Dissy too, by God.

He settled himself a little more comfortably on the bench and shifted so that the light fell directly on the paper. A very great pity, however, that Jeanne isn't here. She would so very much like to know Mrs. Who She's Been all these years. Mrs. The Son of a Son of a Bitch who had a particularly fiendish virago for a stepmother, who presently lives in a coffee pot and gives you letters from her lunatic connections if you don't watch out. Damned heavy thick letters at that. Veritable manuscripts, in fact. Take you all night to read them, in fact. All very sad indeed.

However, in the light of the fact that in the fifth decade of the twentieth century in the year of our Lord, man proud man has discovered a way to multiply agony and anguish upon the earth in never before to be imagined quantity and quality, manufacture it like soap or atom bombs—'twould warm the cockles of the heart of Lucifer himself. So, my children, Maidie, Jeanne, ladies and gentlemen, in the light of that, I say, why should one moderately sad, sordid little story occupy our attention for one minute. The house of Albany came tumbling down and I alone escaped to tell the tale.

That is, when I open this letter that I hold before me, I can tell how a particular chapter is coming along.

So at last he opened it. Ripped it jaggedly, tore way down into the superscription, broke through the stamps, Thomas Jefferson's serene lavender profile, seven of them smudged and blackened with the post office cancellation, it was six days old, he noticed.

He did not read the enclosed pages at once, merely leafed through them curiously.

It began without salutation of any kind. He looked at the writing, illegible and wilder even in places than on the envelope, back-hand, the letters seemed ready to fall over backwards so extreme was the slope, whereas the lines themselves slanted downwards on the pages, dragged down by that peculiar gravity that is the testament that the kingdom of hell is within.

In contrast to the writing on the envelope, the letter started in a minute hand which continued for several pages, then the huge letters appeared again. It was obvious that various parts of the letter had been written at different times, some of the pages were yellowed and brittle at the edges, a congeries of notes that had finally been put together and sealed in the envelope.

He noted at the end the signature without surprise, in a way he had expected it, it was right and proper, it was inevitable, the name of his half-sister, Eurydice. My little sister, Dissy. So excellently named Dissy, christened Eurydice which didn't really fit her at the time and so we needs must call her Dissy. And now if we take one backwards look into hell we must stay there forever.

The letter was signed with the diminutive, Dissy. Ah, you too, Dissy. He had known it all along, it would be, it would have to be. It made him feel infinitely weary to know this of Jessica Albany, this of her daughter.

It was the signature of Dissy. The same who had said, "I don't want any ice cream after all." The clumsy offering of his extremity. The one kind act that he could recall intending to do, attempted for this sober-faced little girl with clear blue eyes, she was as sorely beset as he was, but his kindness was no kindness after all.

He had realised it perfectly well when he looked at the dark leaves of the rhododendrons swaying and moving as she crept among them. But she had walked by his side down the long winding driveway pretending that she believed him up to the very end. She had walked demurely holding his hand letting him talk of

kinds of ice cream, of double scoops, of chocolate chips scattered on top, of green ice cream, of marble ice cream, of maple nut and chocolate marshmallow.

She had pointed to some birds gathered in a bare tree and had said, "They are talking to each other."

He had said they are getting ready to fly south. Then he had said there was tutti frutti and pistachio and cherry ice cream.

"Yes," she said, "and there's lemon ice." She said, "I should like to get a lemon ice and take it back to Maidie."

"I don't think she would want it now." He tried to think of some excuse. "She said she wasn't a bit hungry."

"I'll take her back one of those little birds made out of lemon ice, if she doesn't want to eat it, she can look at it because it's so pretty."

"Wait until tomorrow, Dissy. She said she was going to sleep and the lemon ice would melt."

"Yes . . . the lemon ice would melt if she . . . went to sleep. . . . David, what other kinds of ice cream are there?"

"There are all the sherbets, orange ice, and raspberry, and lime and strawberry."

Then they had come to the end of the drive and the gate. Dissy had turned away saying, "I don't want any ice cream after all." She had run into the rhododendrons so he would not see her face.

They showed me all the letters that you returned to me unopened. I can understand why you were afraid to open them. I suppose you won't open this one either and as a matter of fact they don't want me to send it. They watch me all the time but I am clever enough to get around them. They are stupid and evil and I suppose that's why you made me come here. I am surprised, however, that you aren't afraid that they would open the letters and read the truth. Yes, when you live in a lie you must be very much afraid that the truth will come out. It will come out, you can be very sure of that. People will put two and two together. You can't fool all the people all the time. You have always hated me and now you have conspired to rob

me. That is the truth and you know it and you know that soon everybody will know. I think there is . . .

(The next page is written in a different hand and in pencil.)

I was terribly frightened. I felt like a little dried up leaf. Exactly like a leaf that has become little and small. Whole parts of my mind seem to have withered up. I don't mean that I forget things. I don't forget anything, it is hard to explain what I mean. I tried to tell them what I meant but they didn't understand very well. Then I had to go and see Dr. Winters and I was terribly frightened.

They said I should wear my green dress, but I don't have any green dress. Oh yes you have, they said. They found a green dress in the closet. Oh, oh, that doesn't belong to me, I don't know how it got there but I assure you that I don't even own a green dress.

I wouldn't look at Dr. Winters. He kept talking to me and tried to make me look at him but I didn't want to. I knew perfectly well what he would look like. He talked to me for a long time, but I wouldn't look at him and when he asked me questions I wouldn't answer.

Sometimes I try to forgive you. But it is a very hard thing to do. Sometimes I get mixed up about things. There are all those terrible people here. That is why you put me here so I would be with the terrible people and they would drive me mad. I know that is what you all want, but I am clever enough to see that. They make me answer questions all the time but you can be very sure I never fall into their traps. Then I have to go out and associate with the poor people that they have already made go mad.

I was very innocent. I didn't know that such things went on in the United States, that people could be tortured until they went insane. They know I am too clever for them and now they are trying to poison me. They wake me up in the middle of the night and shine lights in my eyes, and while I am still half asleep they try to make me drink all those drugs. But I know what they're up to. I have some powerful friends and I

know they will protect me. They are so powerful that they can even protect me from you. I have written them how you have treated me, but I didn't really have to because they can put two and two together. When I become afraid, I remember them, because I know that if anything happens to me, they will revenge me.

Yesterday I didn't get up at all. I stayed in bed all day. The wind was blowing. They said why don't you get up and I said I feel like staying in bed. I was afraid they would make me get up but they went away and left me alone. The wind was blowing terribly. I woke up at four o'clock in the morning hearing it whistle in the eaves and I couldn't go back to sleep. It kept blowing like that all day long. I looked out the window and I saw the leaves being torn off the branches and blowing away. I said, Ah my poor little sisters and I began to cry.

I forgot to tell you they put me in the Purlieus. That's where they put all the suicidal patients. But I didn't want to kill myself. I wouldn't give you that satisfaction. I told them that I was a RH baby and that I had to have all my blood changed. They wouldn't do it so that's why I cut my wrists with the scissors that I found. But I kept thinking that the blood I have in my veins is the same that you have in yours and I hate you so much that I think it must poison me. The nicest thing in the world was when I saw the blood coming out of my wrists.

Dr. Winters came to see me every day. I dreaded that more than anything else. He said I had to answer his questions and that he wouldn't go away unless I did. So I had to answer them because even though I never looked at him, him just being near me, sitting on the chair beside the bed made me tremble so that my teeth chattered.

He asked me whether I was cold and I told him I was shivering because the wind was blowing. The wind really wasn't blowing that day, it was very still. I remember I wished the wind were blowing because it was so hot and so still. But that was the day after Maidie's funeral and Father came and put his hands on my shoulders and said, "We do not know our crimes until it is too late."

Dr. Winters asked me what I dreamed about. It is a silly question that the doctors always ask you. It's supposed to show what's going on in your subconscious. I told him I dreamed I was a leaf. An old, dried up leaf. Then he asked me and I will give him the credit for being a little clever, being able to put two and two together, he asked me whether that was why I was shivering on account of the wind. But of course I told him that wasn't why at all, that I know perfectly well I'm not a leaf.

Once I found a leaf in a book. Maidie and I were reading it together and the leaf fell out. I said, what is that? And she told me it was a leaf. I asked her, who put it there. And she said, I think my mother put it there, it was her book. I said why would Mother put it there? She said, I think my mother was trying to remember something by it, it was a memento. I said why do you say *my* mother all the time. And she said my mother is different from yours: Father married twice.

I asked, is David's mother different too? I hated David because he was always bad and wicked. Mother used to hit him with a little whip. Once I told her something bad he had done and she whipped him. I was glad at first then I felt sorry because he cried so much. I thought if Mother whipped me like that I would die, but later on she did and I got used to it. Maidie said David had the same mother that she did. I asked her what I'd have to do so I wouldn't be different from her any more.

Dr. Winters said even if the leaves do blow off the trees, they grow back on again the next spring. He said people couldn't really be like a leaf, they were more like a tree. Father was like a tree. He was like a wonderful big tree. Then he died.

He went away but I always thought he would come back, then I was in boarding school and I kept hoping every time I came home for the holidays that he would be there. Then Mother wrote me that he had died...

As a matter of fact I was very mixed up about things when I came here, I was so upset over Father's dying. That was lucky for you, you thought in your wicked dishonest way, because you could take advantage of my grief and have me locked up

here with a lot of crazy people and you hoped that would drive me insane so that you could get all the money that Father had left me.

Well, it didn't work out quite that way, did it, because after all there are some honest people in the world. Dr. Winters said I should call him Dr. Peter. Peter is his first name. Then when he came in and called himself Dr. Peter I didn't get so frightened any more. It was silly before, I know. But I've gotten to like Dr. Peter very much.

I told Dr. Peter it was perfectly obvious that when you felt that Father didn't love you any more you turned on us children. You turned on the others first and then later on me. He told me he thought I must be mistaken. Then I wouldn't talk to him any more.

I was down town in the village when I saw Father. He was walking along with a lady I didn't know and laughing very much. I waved at him but he didn't see me. It was autumn and the leaves were falling. I ran all the way home and I sat on the porch waiting for Father to come. I sat on the swing that was green. I was going to tell Father how I'd seen him when he hadn't seen me. Then Father came home and I ran down the path to meet him, but just that minute I heard you open the door and you said very crossly, "Where 'ave you been, you know very well we're supposed to go to the Brainards?" You said it so crossly. I looked at Father's face and I saw it getting red. "There's plenty of time," he said. "I know very well that you left the office early. Just where have you been all this time?" Your voice sounded terrible. I closed my eyes, I said, please, please, please don't sound like that. You said, "Just exactly who do you think you are?" and then you slammed the door and went into the house.

You were lying down in your room. You were sick. You had a headache and we weren't supposed to make any noise. Only I forgot. I was playing a game and I ran down the hall. You came out and pinched my arm. It made a black and blue spot that stayed for a long time.

I asked Father if Maidie's mother was as pretty as you and he

said that Maidie's mother was the most beautiful woman he had ever known. Then he said Comparisons are Odious didn't I know that.

Maidie died in September. At the very end of September. But she was buried in October. It's strange because Maidie said her mother died in October and Maidie wasn't buried until October. I didn't go to the funeral because I was so sick and I stayed home and I watched out the window at the leaves falling. It was hot for October and so still, the leaves dropped off the trees, they just dropped, there wasn't any wind that blew them off. I cried and cried thinking about Maidie. Nanny was with me but I never liked Nanny so very much. You had a headache when you came home and you didn't come to see me at all. Father didn't come home until late and I had to go to sleep before he came home. I saw him the next day and he looked all funny and his face was all puffy. He looked at me as though he didn't see me. I said, "Father, Father!" Then he put his hand on my shoulder and said, "We do not know our crimes until it is too late." I could feel his breath blowing in my face.

Dr. Peter said I should write everything down. I told him you returned all my letters without even opening them. He said they probably weren't very nice letters. I said no, they weren't very nice letters.

I asked Dr. Peter whether he believes in God. He said everyone must decide for himself or herself what to believe. I have begun to pray again. I don't know whether I believe or not. I say to myself over and over, believe, believe, believe.

Today the wind was blowing and I went out and took a long walk. It felt good, the wind was blowing in my face. I came in to write a letter. I don't know whether you will read it or not.

(Suddenly the handwriting has become clear and legible, though by no means neat. The paper is fresh and it bears a salutation. It was dated in the corner, the previous Saturday. Apparently the letter was to have been folded around the packet of other papers

and the creases show that it had been, but then refolded and tucked in back.)

Dear Mother,

There is nothing I can do to make you read my letters and when I look at the horrible ones that I wrote, I don't blame you at all. But I hope that you will read this one.

Dr. Peter says I am much better and that I can come home sometimes to visit. I'd like to do that very much. I have written to you about it so many times but you don't answer the letters. I think maybe you didn't open them because you thought they would be horrible like the others. I asked Dr. Peter to write to you, but he said you didn't answer his letters either. They won't let me come home unless you write saying that I may. I don't know what to do if you don't answer. I am worried that you are sick and that's why you don't ever write. I want you to forgive me. I want everything to be nice again, the way it was once. I think you should have all the money that Father left. I will gladly give you all my share at least. I shan't need it, at all.

I am sending you all the things I wrote down for Dr. Peter and some of the bad letters. It shows I'm all mixed up but I am getting better. I am certain of it and then I can be a good daughter.

I know if you saw me you would see that I am better, but maybe you can see it from all these things I'm sending you. Please answer this, please do. I will run away so I can see you if you don't write so that they will give me permission. I know how I can do it, but I want to be good and I want to be a good daughter.

I wore my green dress and Dr. Peter said it was very becoming.

Everything looks very silly. Oh well.

This letter looks so fat and long, maybe you won't want to read it all. That's quite all right. Really it is. Only please write to me soon. I want to come home so much.

Love,
Dissy

P.S. They let me go into the village now during the day if I want to go to the store or to get a shampoo. Also I can go to the movies if it's not too late. I will mail this from the village because I am going there this afternoon. And the mail goes out quicker from there. There's a bus that stands on the corner and it says Carnival-by-the-Sea on the front and I wish I could get in and come. Please write to me that I may. I will be good and behave well.

Love again,
Dissy

Chapter 2

MRS. ALBANY always woke up very early. "In the teensie gray hours of the morning," she said. When Mrs. Tandy came, her mistress always called out fretfully, "That you, Mrs. Tandy?"

"Yes, it's me, Missus. And I thought this morning you were asleep for sure and I wasn't making a sound." Calling in from the bottom of the outside steps. "Now up you go, Jackie (or Pug), say good morning to the Missus nicely and get the key." For in all the years she'd worked there, the housekeeper had never been permitted to keep a latchkey. One of the children was brought along to scramble up the front porch and take the key that Mrs. Albany passed him through the window. Her bed was close to that window or if she had gotten herself into the wheel chair she would manoeuvre it over. When the child tapped on the pane she lifted the sash a crack and slipped the key through. He took it to his grandmother who then went around to the back entrance.

"No, Mrs. Tandy, I've been awake for hours and hours."

"And I was waitin' out here, Missus, never making a sound in the world, I was so sure you was sleeping yet."

"In fact I thought perhaps you weren't coming at all. I thought perhaps you'd forgotten to come."

She made this remark every morning and every single morning Annie Tandy bridled and bristled. "When have you ever known Annie Tandy *not* to come. And what in the world would make Annie Tandy *forget* to come, will you tell me that!"

"Ah well, you're here now and that's what counts. But it is a bit late this morning." The whole interchange was as unvarying and unalterable as the ceremony of an ancient church.

Mrs. Tandy snorted and answered sharply, "It's the same time as usual to be sure."

And indeed it was early. Half past five or quarter to six at the latest. In the winter not even light, and cold—"Lor, it's so cold the breath would freeze in your nostrils if you didn't keep blowing them out." Mrs. Tandy heaved herself out of bed at four thirty and dressed in the dark, keeping real quiet and never making a sound except maybe when the floor squeaked under her weight, sometimes you just can't help walking on one of those noisy boards, but pretty well she knew where they were and tried to walk around them, all so's not to wake up John Everett and that wife of his, Edna. Pug and Jackie both slept in her room and after Annie got finished dressing herself and fixing up for the day, she'd take one of them up, still fast asleep and carry him down to the kitchen.

It's a trouble and all getting to work so early, but thinking about the Missus being awake for hours and hours and never any breakfast or even hot coffee till I get there, it's more'n bears thinking about, and anyways I'd never be one to lie abed all day meself. The longer you slug abed, the harder it is to get up when you get to be my age, I always say. Though the young ones are different, I allow. Why take on a Sunday, John Everett and Edna don't hardly get up till noon. Unless they're going somewheres that is. But weekday or Sunday, Annie Tandy, she gets up. Getting breakfasts for folks and fixin' things up don't ever know any holidays.

Eight o'clock it used to be when she went to Mrs. Albany. Then it was seven and then it was six, and now it had got to be crowding five-thirty, sometimes she even made it by quarter past five, but whenever it was that she got there, Mrs. Albany said, "I've been awake for hours and hours. I thought perhaps you'd forgotten to come. Isn't it a bit late this morning?"

For Mrs. Albany awakened always at that locked, spooky time of night long before dawn. "They say it's always darkest before

day, but I've watched thousands and thousands of them come and I've never noticed that."

It's quiet then, quiet as it ever gets by the ocean, of course. The ocean makes a racket, just the same no matter if it's night or day, but the dogs are quiet, except for their breathing. Pinkie dreams sometimes and whimpers some, it makes you wonder what a dog is dreaming about when they whimper in their sleep. She reaches down her hand because Pinkie always sleeps right beside her bed and pats the dog till she falls quiet.

Mr. Poco's asleep too. His cage is covered up and underneath that, she knows because she's looked sometimes, he's perched stiff on one leg with the funny, wrinkled grey bird eyelids pulled down tight over his eyes. There aren't any cars on the highway, this is the scenic route, and slow and twisty so the all-night drivers almost always take the other road. Though, of course, there's the United Buslines Bus that always comes through puffing and changing gears on the hill, belching out fumes that come in through the windows even when they are closed—she never could get them fixed so they'd close very tight. The sea air and the dampness warps the frame and sash and there isn't anything to be done about it.

Perhaps it was the bus going by that woke her up. It goes by every night at just that time. Up the road there is a bend and then a long grade, so she'd hear the scraping of gears before the bus got to the top and the light shone in the window. Then it shifted again and came thundering down and the double cast of light slanted across the wall.

She had been a light sleeper always so probably it was the United bus that woke her up. After it had passed she'd lie perfectly still waiting for its smell to seep in through the windows, that is unless Pinkie whimpered in her sleep, then she'd reach down her hand, and stroke that rough, furry head. She kept sniffing all the time, however, waiting for the smell, not that she liked it, but anxious to get it over with.

She'd wake up hardly knowing where she was. It was strange because she'd slept in that selfsame room in that selfsame bed for

years and years and now in her old age she hardly ever left that room even to go out and sit on the porch.

"Huh, Missus, you're a young woman yet."

"Not so old in years, maybe, but old, old." She hated it: being old.

"Sure, it takes the hip bone a while to mend, but when it does you'll be up and around as spry as anyone. When you're feeling poorly 'course you feel old, it's the nature of it, Missus. But I warrant you I'm twenty years your senior. I was married and having babies long before you were born and look at me, I'm not old."

"Old," Mrs. Albany would whisper, "old," and closing her eyes hold up a frail hand, a signal for Mrs. Tandy to give over. Other times she would go on to remark how she came from a short-lived family. She took a peculiar pride in it. "My mother died when she was forty-seven and my father never reached sixty. My grandfather lived the longest of any of us and he died when he was sixty-three. No, none of us lives very long, but when you come to think of it, it's the first half of life that's the one worth having."

Lying there in the quiet room, dark now that the bus lights had passed, she'd think of the first twenty-five years of her life and the last twenty-five, and heaven forbid, she would say it aloud, that there be another twenty-five years; she would never be able to endure the allotted span, three-score years and ten.

Presently she would know where she was. The light had been enough for her to see and remember the familiar room, big and round with a low pitched ceiling—it had been the dining room when the building was a roadhouse and occupied the entire first floor. She had it filled up with her furniture—that was why she had bought the fantastic house in the first place, it was the only one that was big enough to hold all her furniture—set in ugly rows with aisles between up which she could wheel her chair.

Near her bed was a chest of drawers she really used, a writing table, some open shelving for books and magazines; there was an easy chair she sat in perhaps twice a year, the rest of the time it

held the clothes she had taken off the night before. She used a second table beside her bed, the lower part of which comprised a cupboard for her medicines, drops, vials, ointments, pills, an electric heating pad and a bed pan. On top was the lamp, of course, and a clock she never looked at, but kept set and wound, she wore a wristwatch also on her skinny arm, though what she needed with time was anybody's guess. There was a small radio which she listened to occasionally when she felt like it without any regard to what programme was playing.

At the far end of the room was an electric plate on which Mrs. Tandy did the cooking and a refrigerator which was mostly stored with dog food, though there was a section of it set aside for Mrs. Albany's perishable medicines.

For the rest, the furniture in the room was quite unused. Chairs, tables, sideboards, highboys, lowboys, chiffoniers, dressing tables, dismembered beds, wardrobes, chests of drawers, fancy statues, oil lamps, gas mantles, glassed-in cabinets, mahogany bookcases, curio stands, oil paintings, incidental chairs, easy chairs, writing desks, a secretary that reached to the ceiling, gaming tables with green baize tops, bricabrac, couches, sofas, on and on the list stretched like the inventory of an antique dealer, row on row, fitted in purposelessly except as storage; there were ugly pieces and beautiful pieces, genuine antiques mixed with what was merely ornamental and showy, elaborate marquetry, gold leaf, marble, satin or petitpoint upholsteries, jumbled together as though these furnishings of palaces had been swept by a flood and caught in this strange backwater, dusted occasionally.

("Dusting it, it's a real job, believe me, but the Missus likes it when it's done. She runs her finger over a piece and if it comes off black she doesn't say a word, I told her when I went there first, 'Now Missus, you can't ever expect me to keep all that dusted.' And I'll say this for her, she never says a word when she runs her finger along the top of a piece and it comes off black. Now she doesn't say anything either if she finds it's dusted and clean, but I can tell she's glad, she has a way of going on real quick to the next

piece.") So Mrs. Tandy dusted a little here and a little there, whenever she had time each day, but it took her about six months to get around to where she'd started.

Dusted occasionally it was, this flotsam and jetsam of men's ease and elegance, marshalled in these rows, fantastically useless where they stood, but just the same examined and inspected each day, like troops in review by the wheeling woman; the look on her face as cold and inquisitorial as any martinet's, frowning, passing, never praising, touching here and there with a long, pale finger, pulling out a drawer and glancing in impersonally, bored, it might even be said she looked, except that the dark, passionately burning eyes for all the artful casualness of the way she arranged her features gave it away that this was no mere vacant pastime, nor even yet a duty, it was more the look of a priest who tends the sacred relics of a saint. Wheeling by with the whirring sound of rubber on the floor, the glittering bicycle spokes of the big rear wheels awakening answering gleams in the shining veneers, backing up, going forward, wheeling herself into corners, manoeuvring, turning around. Tiring, she tired easily, would stop where she was and lean back closing her eyes, but not sleeping for she could hardly ever sleep in the daytime.

"Her eyelids are so unusually thin, the Missus says, that's the reason, if there's the leastest light, closing them doesn't do any good. You feel sorry for her waking up so early and then never being able to catch a nap in the daytime."

Not sleeping but leaning back in the chair for a minute, and then when her strength came back she opened her eyes, though she could have gone through with them tight closed, it was so familiar. So when she awoke in the early morning and lay there in the darkness with her hand out to quiet the whimpering dog, the smallest gleam from the night sky that outlined the shape of the secretary near the window, it was enough and she could reconstruct the entire room.

Comforted. Comforting the dog, comforted herself by the aspect of her things surrounding her in the darkness, imagining

them and at the same time certain that if she reached out her hand to the lamp they would leap instantly and solidly into sight, she lay there comfortably, at this moment not bothered by any pain, staring up at the dim sky, an oblique square through her window, misted or clouded over perhaps, clear perhaps with the distant seashore stars.

Someone coming upon her then, the silent, unmoving figure upon the bed, would be assured she sleeps. Perhaps she roused a little, attained momentarily to consciousness, but she lapses now into slumber and dreams. It is possible that she dies a little, she lies so stiffly and so narrowly as on a bier and the wandering thoughts that possess her spirit may be likened to restless ghosts, haunting other rooms than this, more shady even than this that's plunged in night, those other vistas darkened by time itself.

Presently her breath becomes heavy and she tosses her head from side to side. Now she awakens the dogs, one by one. "Spot, Spot, come here to me, Spot!" calling out, they nuzzle her, sniff at her ears. Shep stretches and leaps upon the bed, towers over her with stiff paws heavy on her shoulders, Pinkie's rope tail pounds the floor.

"Stop it, Spot, don't lick my face so. Get down, Shep. Oh, you're so heavy, Shep. Down girl. There's a good girl, Pinkie. No, no, Shep, down. Lie down. There's a good dog. You too, Spot, Lie down. Lie down all of you and go back to sleep, that's it. Lie down. Lie down."

For suddenly she had begun to cry. It would come upon her, these dry crying spells, open mouthed with her breath catching and sobbing in her throat, but tearless, she squeezed her eyes but no moisture came there, seared aridity, the ducts gone dry, the peculiar agony that cannot weep. "Come to me," she'd call to her dogs, and then when the fit had passed, command them back to their places.

It would seem that some pain had reasserted itself, from the unknitting bone, from the outraged nerves and sinews, for she would take a capsule from the bottle on the table, an anodyne; she'd

attach the heating pad and as the warmth crept through the wadded material, she'd lay it against her back and chirrup, "Well, my loves, that feels a whole lot better."

"But I've seen the Missus turn grey with pain, and rigid, but she sets her teeth against it. I've seen her so she can't hardly speak, and smile, it's a grim smile with white around her lips from pressing them together, but she's brave, the Missus is. It breaks your heart she's so brave. I'll just happen to come in there and she's sittin' there with that grey set look on her face and never even called me. Why if she'da called me I'da dropped everything I was doing, but not her. I go in there and she smiles at me that way she has and maybe she nods her head towards Mr. Poco who gives you a funny look and squawks and flaps his wings cause you look at him putting on a show. And I says, 'You're hurtin', Missus. Can I get you a pill or do you want me to rub you?'

"And she says, 'Maybe you would, Mrs. Tandy, if it isn't too much trouble. The back's kicking up a bit, or maybe there's a cramp in my feet. I guess it's a good idea to take a pill for it.'

"And if I give her a pill and a fresh glass of water she sets there holding it in her hand and not takin' it though it's sure to make her feel better as soon as she gets it down.

"I say, 'Take your pill, Missus. And drink up the water.' It's good for the constitution, water is. The more liquid you drink the better it is for you, I always say. But she isn't in any hurry. She says, 'I think Mr. Poco there is a real character.'

"That he is, Missus, now you let me rub your feet for you.'

"'Well, if it isn't too much trouble, Mrs. Tandy.' Never a fuss, never a complaint, and if I hadn'ta come in who was to know if she was hurtin' or not."

Surely it wasn't the pain alone for soon miserlike she switched off the electricity. Oh it's a crying shame what they charge for electricity nowadays. The rates go up and up. And she had only taken an aspirin or two not one of those other pills that cost twenty-five cents apiece. Shep jarred the bed cruelly leaping up and the heavy weight on her shoulder wrenched her back.

No, it's not the pain so much. I could tell those doctors a thing or two about pain. But it's not the pain. It's like the everlasting fires of hell, they burn and consumeth not. I cry because I'm a sad old woman, don't you think I have plenty of reason to be sad. It's sad to be old and to be crippled and to know that here you are in a house and you'll never leave this house again alive. It makes you sad thinking about it. This house I'm in is the house I'm going to die in.

The crying comes and the sobbing, choking up of breath. They say you shouldn't ever feel sorry for yourself but if you were somebody else you couldn't help being sorry. Come Shep, come here to me, Spot. Oh Pinkie, Pinkie, wake up girl and let me feel you near me. You couldn't help pitying a person that's all crippled and old and dying in a house she'll never go away from.

Do you know what I was thinking about. I saw the side of the secretary against the window. I saw a little gleam of light in the glass up on top, reflecting the beacon light from the headland, a tiny flash of white and then when I kept watching a little flash of red. I was wondering because I'd never noticed it before and then I remembered Mrs. Tandy had its doors open this afternoon when she was dusting.

Next to the secretary is the mahogany breakfront. I put my finger on it and it came off horrible black. I didn't say a word to Mrs. Tandy but she was standing right beside me watching me. I said, "You make me nervous standing there and watching me, Mrs. Tandy, if you don't mind my saying so."

A little while later she got out the dust rag and went over the breakfront and the secretary. I knew she wasn't going to do the inside. She's a big, lazy good for nothing, I must say, so I said to her, "Be careful how you do those Dresden figures inside, there. Maybe you better not bother, I'd hate like anything for them to get broken."

"When did you ever know Annie Tandy to break anything, Missus?" she said and I knew I'd hurt her feelings. But she opened

the doors and dusted inside. I suppose she didn't fasten them tight when she finished.

I lay there watching that little flash of red and then that little flash of white mirrored in the glass. Next to the breakfront is the little birdseye maple writing table I used to have at home. Most of the furniture I got later after I married, but I always kept that little birdseye maple writing table. Most of the time we kept it in the attic because it didn't fit with the rest of the things, but I never would give it away or sell it, not for anything in the world.

Sometimes dealers would come to the house. I was thinking of selling some of the other furniture, I never did, they're always crooks and robbers, those dealers. I showed them the carved Italian chairs and they offered me a thousand dollars apiece for them. I just laughed at them. I told them I wouldn't think of parting with them for that. Once I took them up in the attic and asked them how much will you give me for that writing table.

Oh, they said, that's not worth very much. It's just birdseye maple. It's quite pretty, but nobody's buying that stuff any more. It would just be a fluke if we could sell it. It would be to somebody who just happened to fancy it and we couldn't charge anything for it. We'll take it away for you if you want or maybe we can let you have ten dollars for it, but certainly not more than that.

I made them stop talking and showed them to the door. But that just shows how they don't know the value of things or that they're trying to cheat you. It's a valuable piece and very old. It belonged to my great-grandmother who brought it over with her from France. I like to think of her sitting at it all dressed in silks and satins and writing billets doux. She was very beautiful. There used to be a miniature of her and they said she had my eyes, very large and almond shaped.

She only lived for three years after she got to America. Her people were ruined in the revolution of '48 and that's why they came. If she had lived longer they would have gone back because they were very noble people and Napoleon the Third would have

restored them. But she died and left my grandmother, a little baby, to be brought up by strangers.

She came from a rich old culture, my great-grandmother did, and she couldn't stand it here. America has always been far behind Europe in civilization. It still is. It still has years to go before it is as civilized as the France that my great-grandmother left to pine away in exile.

My mother gave me the little writing table and it always stood in my room. It was in the corner of my room in the Ulysses Avenue house and when I was very young I used to sit at it when I did my lessons.

Then later when we moved to Clinton Boulevard and I had the prettiest room of all I had it right under the window. When I was writing letters I could look out and see the rose garden all in bloom. I remember the last year I stayed there, there were more roses than ever before. I remember sitting at my writing table—we had just had it fixed with a new top with brass studs to hold the blotter in place. There was a vase in front of me that was shaped like a cornucopia held up by a shepherd and a shepherdess. I remember it perfectly, and it was full of yellow roses. I remember how they smelled so sweet, a rose odour and a tea odour together, and the blotter was light green and my writing paper matched it.

I looked out into the garden at the roses that were white and red and yellow, and some of them were peach coloured, and a light breeze was blowing so that these pretty blooms moved a little and nodded their heads to me. I could smell their odour very sweet and somewhat thin mixed with the tearose scent of the roses in the vase.

I was so happy then and so young. I wasn't really young. I suppose I was in my twenties and even though I was very beautiful, people, my family, used to think I wasn't ever going to marry. I had lots of chances but I didn't want to. I wanted to have a career. My mother understood. She understood perfectly. She used to say to me, I want you to have a career, Jessica. I don't

want you to ever have to be dependent on a man. Oh, how right my mother was. I never realised how cruel my father was until I realised how cruel men could be. In those days we used to talk about women's rights. My mother used to say, it's come too late for me to benefit, but Jessica, you must always remember that you are free and never let any man take that away from you.

And yet my mother liked Stephen Albany. She said, Jessica, I think Stephen will make you happy, and he has lots of money, you will never want for anything. That is something. Besides my career wasn't very much. I was Stephen's secretary.

I thought I was happy that day when I sat at my little writing table looking out at the rose garden. In three days I was to be married to Stephen Albany and I thought I would be happy. I loved him with all my heart and I thought that he loved me.

I was wearing a bracelet that he had given me. It was set with diamonds and rubies that sparkled in the sun. My arm looked very smooth and white and suddenly I kissed it. I kissed my own arm, wasn't that a funny thing to do! I looked in the mirror and I saw myself and I thought I would be the prettiest bride that there had been seen in this town for many a year. Afterwards people told me I was the most beautiful bride that they had ever seen. I was very beautiful in those days. It's stupid to deny that that was so. I wasn't vain about it, of course, but I know that I was beautiful, I couldn't help knowing it. Every time I looked into the mirror I could see that I was.

I was sitting at my little writing table writing over and over on a piece of paper Mrs. Stephen Albany, Jessica Albany, Dr. and Mrs. Stephen Albany request the pleasure of your company . . . I had a very fine handwriting and as I wrote the bracelet sparkled in the sunshine. It was a silly thing to do, write over and over, Mrs. Stephen Albany, Jessica Albany, Dr. and Mrs. Stephen Albany request the pleasure of your company . . . , it's the sort of thing that ugly girls do who never expect to get married, but I was trying to get used to my new name. It seemed funny that I wouldn't have my old name any more. I remember once I wrote,

Mrs. Stephen d'Albany. It would have been more distinguished if Stephen had had a de in his name. My great-grandmother's name was Marianne Therese de Roche.

I wish our family had kept the name de Roche, but my grandmother married an Englishman and then they only had daughters and so there wasn't much chance that the name would be kept. I thought it would be nice if Stephen and I could use a hyphenated name, Dr. and Mrs. Stephen de Roche-Albany request the pleasure of your company . . . But he laughed when I told him. Then I wrote down Jessica Albany, it seemed very plain and I frowned.

But my mother had come up behind me and put her hand on my shoulder. She looked over and saw what I was doing. She sat down on a chair and said, "I hope Jessica Albany will be very happy."

I knelt beside her and hid my face in her lap. I was weeping. I don't know why. I was weeping with real tears coming out of my eyes. My mother kept patting my hair and saying, "Don't cry, don't cry, child. Why is my pretty little girl crying?"

"I don't know, Mother," I said. "I don't know." Then I got up and looked at myself in the mirror but my eyes weren't red, they just looked very shiny and even larger than usual. But I had to comb my hair because Mother had mussed it up.

I didn't feel sad any more at all. I hadn't felt sad before when I wept, but now I felt purged and cleansed. I wished my mother hadn't kept on sitting there, I wanted to be alone and sit looking out at the rose garden with the blooms all nodding their heads at me in the breeze. I didn't speak to her because I thought if I kept quiet she might see that I wanted to be alone and would go away. I didn't even look at her.

There were some climbing roses on a trellis outside my window. My mother wouldn't go. She sat and sat. I kept looking at the roses nodding their heads at me. There was a bee flying around the roses on the trellis outside my window and I watched the bee, so big and furry and brown flying back and forth and then right into the rose. I thought I would like to be a little bee and go into

that lovely velvet chamber and I should sit there and be quiet alone and nobody could come in at all.

I looked at my mother and I saw that she was watching the back of my head. I thought maybe she'll go now. I thought maybe she'll get up and say, "Well, Jessica, dearie, I have things to do, I must be going along now." I kept thinking that over and over in my head, hoping that she would do that. I began to feel impatient that she couldn't see that I wanted to be alone.

Finally, I realised that I would have to say something to her. I wanted her to leave. I was trying to think what I should say when I looked at her. I saw her face and I realised I mustn't say anything.

It was the strangest look she had on her face. I'll never forget it. To this day, I can't forget it, and how many times I have seen her face. It has appeared before me wearing that strange and terrible expression. It has flashed before my eyes, time without number, filled with pity and agony and horror, and anger. Yes, there was anger too, in my mother's face, mingled with the pity and agony and horror.

"Mother," I said, "Mother, what is it?"

"Mother, Mother, what is it, Mother?" I was asking.

"Jessica, oh my little Jessica." She had bent her head so low I couldn't see her face any longer, just her hair streaked with white, curling and piled up but even so a little thin.

I did not recognise my mother's voice when she said, "I wanted to speak to you, Jessica. I wanted to tell you things." I could hardly hear her voice, she spoke so low, I could hardly make out the words.

My mother's hands were rather large but very smooth and soft. When she stretched her fingers out, the thumbs turned backwards. I can remember how on that day when she spoke she had her hands flat on her lap against the brown silk dress she wore, those white hands trembling a little and the thumbs curling away from each other, just touching.

The old woman lay stiff and rigid on her narrow bed sobbing, choked in the black morning, called out, "Come to me, Spot. Come here, Shep. Oh Shep, oh Shep! Here Pinkie. Come here, Pinkie. Oh Pinkie! Oh oh oh. What will become of you all when I am gone? Oh Shep, get down. Get down, girl, good doggie, Pinkie." Then when they have returned to their places on the floor she swallows the aspirin with a little water and turns on the heating pad and slips it under the small of her back.

"Well, my loves, that feels a whole lot better."

Spot scratches herself enthusiastically and her paw pounds on the floor. Pinkie stands up and turns herself around several times before settling down, her white coat can just be seen in the murk. Shep lies further away with her head down between her paws but her ears pricked up. If Mrs. Albany should turn on the light she would see the dog's yellow eyes fixed upon her face. But for a long time she remains in the dark quietly thinking her thoughts, she calls it, but not falling back to sleep, she never goes back to sleep once she has awakened nor does she become sad again. These overwhelming anguishes beset her every day but rarely more than once.

Now she equitably reviews the day before or the day that is to come. Today is the eighteenth, the early morning of the eighteenth. The passion for dates has not left her any more than her passion for time ticked out by the several clocks and watches in the room; she possesses a large daily calendar and sees to it that Mrs. Tandy never forgets to pull off the pages, as well as other calendars; there is a perpetual calendar of cast metal on the shelf above her bed, an intricate device with gold letters that pop up into a little frame, and, of course, commercial calendars—Mrs. Tandy knows her passion and brings them from the stores in profusion at the beginning of each year. These are duly posted no matter how insipid or downright ugly they may be.

Various days are circled or checked: anniversaries which Mrs. Albany never does more than to observe birthdays, deaths, special occasions. I could write notes, I suppose, but on a happy occasion

who would want to hear from a poor old woman such as I, and if it is a sad and solemn time, my writing would only add fuel to the flames, so to speak. But marked they all are on the calendar and thought about this time of day and if it is a date in her own history, rather than the date of a friend's birth or death, Mrs. Albany will think of it incessantly all day long and remark on it to Mrs. Tandy.

"Why, Mrs. Tandy, for a while there, I thought you weren't coming. I really did."

"But Missus, I'm a bit early, if anything. I got up earlier than usual, I did. I woke up and I thought well it's not time to get up yet and then I got to thinking about how the Missus always wakes up so early and she's layin' there poor thing waiting for me to come and fix her up some breakfast, so I got up right then, and here I am earlier than usual if anything."

"Well, I've been awake for hours and hours, and it's possible that I lost track of the time. Maybe it's early as you say, but I was worrying that maybe you'd forgotten to come. And today of all days! It's a rather special day, you know."

"Why, Missus, Annie Tandy wouldn't ever forget to come. And you can just stop worrying your head about it. Annie Tandy *always* comes, maybe a mite late sometimes, but early too some of the time. But tell me what day this is that you were talking about. I'm good enough at remembering times but maybe sometimes I forget dates a little. To tell you the truth I couldn't tell you what day of the week it is. Is it a real important date that I should have remembered, Missus?"

"Well, I suppose you really wouldn't remember." (If she felt like teasing Mrs. Tandy, she'd go on.) "It really isn't so very important, I suppose, especially when you're old. Such things don't really matter—"

"Missus, when that bone mends up and you're up and around you won't even remember feeling old. Believe me . . ."

"Yes, yes, Mrs. Tandy," impatiently, "but as I was saying, cer-

tain anniversaries aren't so important to you when you are older as when you are young. Birthdays, for instance."

"Is it your birthday, Missus!" (Annie Tandy always rose to it even if the trick had been pulled on her but two weeks before.) "And that's a crying shame, Missus, that I didn't know about it. Why it's a real special day, it is. Congratulations, Missus, many happy returns of the day."

"I'll tell you what, I'll bake you a little cake, I will, and maybe I can send Pug out and get us some candles. We'll have a birthday cake for you with candles and all."

And off she'd go to look in the bins for flour and sugar and rack-ing her brains to think of what she could lay her hands on that would do for a present. The Missus has got so many things as it is you'd hardly be able to think of anything to give her. Oh mercy me, we're low on eggs. Pug, Pug, it's the Lord's mercy I brought the older one with me today so I can send him out to get more. And let's see what else do we need? Vanilla. We've got some vanilla left, butter, I just brought in a pound. I'll have Pug get some of those sugar roses when he's out. They look real pretty on a cake.

Mrs. Albany would let her rattle pans and search the cupboards for a bit and then finally relent and call her over, "Mrs. Tandy, I wasn't meaning that it was my birthday today."

"Oh Missus, I thought you said it was."

"No, indeed. I was just remarking that your birthday isn't so important to you after you get on a bit."

"Well feature that." Annie Tandy slaps her hand to her forehead. "And here I was thinking you'd said it was your birthday and I was worrin'in' my head off how I could manage. And that's the truth."

"Well if it were nobody would have remembered, that's for sure."

"Tell me, Missus, when *is* your birthday? I've been meaning to ask you."

"Oh not for a long time yet. And it really doesn't matter. Not really."

(Once Annie Tandy told Mrs. Albany when it was her own birthday. But she was disappointed if she had thought it would be circled on any of the calendars, or remarked upon when it came again.)

"No, Mrs. Tandy, it's a solemn anniversary. Ten years ago today Dr. Albany passed on." She spoke dryly but in an instant Annie Tandy was all tender solicitude and sympathy.

"Aye, Missus, it's a shocking thing, a loss like that, there's no making it up. The years come and the years go and everything's emptiness when your dear one is underground."

Mrs. Albany makes no reply, she has nothing to say, she feels nothing whatsoever. She thinks, if I hadn't marked the date on the calendar, I would hardly have remembered. She sniffed contemptuously as her housekeeper ran on, "Oh you remember the goodness of them, and the kindness and you're lonesome inside. You don't ever get over the lonesomeness. You go on living as long as the good Lord appoints it, but there isn't any reason for it any more. It's twenty years and more that my Bob is gone from me and there isn't a day of my life when I don't say to myself, Bob, he's up in heaven lookin' down and what is Annie Tandy doin' here below! Oh, it's lonesome, lonesome you are when they're gone."

Nothing. Absolutely nothing. I shouldn't have remembered the day in the least if I hadn't marked it on the calendar. However, she remarked piously, "Well, it's God's will."

"Yes, Missus, it's God's will and there's no arguing. When He wants them, He takes them, and you can't argue about it at all. And my Bob, he died alone. He seemed a mite better and was restin' easy and I went out for a bit to get some things, and when I came back he was gone. I felt real terrible I wasn't there. He seemed a mite better and he said to me, 'Annie, I feel a whole lot better. It's a lovin' wife you've been to me all these years, and it looks like you'll not be rid of me yet.' He says, 'Now you go out get us a pint and we'll celebrate.' I didn't know whether the doctor would have approved or not, but my Bob he wanted it so I

went out to get it and when I came back he was gone." She stops for a moment and then asks delicately, "But Dr. Albany, he didn't die alone?"

"No indeed, he didn't die alone."

Mrs. Tandy would have liked to have heard the details. Who was there and what they said, and the dying man struggling for a breath of air under the red coverlet. When did he lose consciousness or was he conscious right up to the end? He must have known he was dying, they always do, and was he scared of death, sometimes they are, did he bid everybody farewell and were his children there? She would have wanted to know the homely details and the horrid details. It's hard to keep them clean when they're dying, they mess themselves like little children and don't hardly know it and what with the smell of medicines and plasters, and my Bob, he had a real bad breath when he was dying, just like a draft from the grave it was smelling his breath.

It was a poor, mean little ci. pboard house that Stephen Albany died in. You would have thought with all the money he'd showered on that Antoinette Wilson, she'd at least have moved to decent quarters. The house stood on a depressing street of one and two family dwellings, all of ancient, rickety wood and all in need of paint and repair. There was a tiny, grassless yard and a single, bedraggled ailanthus tree, bare and stingier than ever this time of year. The backyards of all these houses were partitioned off by dirty fences and filled with clothes lines. Bent and rusty and full garbage cans stood in the street. It's runny, Jessica thought, the poor never manage to get rid of their garbage properly.

The first day that she went there it was bleak and windy, snow was in the sky and would not fall. "Are you sure you know where you're going?" She had asked the cab driver as they went farther and farther into this urban wilderness.

"Orchard Road, you said, Ma'am. Fifty-four Orchard Road, ain't that right?"

It was written down on a paper in her handbag. "Yes, that's what I said, but are you sure that's where we're going?"

He swerved over to the curb, "I know this town like the back of my hand, Ma'am, but if you don't trust me, you can get off right here." A hideous place, an abandoned store building with soaped windows, posters on the crumbling brick, half peeled off and flapping in the wind, Surf Bathing, Reardon for Councilman chalked obscenities. An old and unshaven man stared soddenly into the candy store window next door, then he turned around and gave her a leering look.

The cab driver glowered at her unpleasantly from the front seat, and turned down the flag. He had a dark, disagreeable face with his hat pulled down over his forehead. Herbert Schwartz his name was, she could tell from the card above. She was angry and dismayed and horrified, quite hopeless, but it was to her credit she was not frightened.

"I don't know the neighbourhood at all," she said coolly. "I merely hope you're right."

"Well, do you want to get out or don't you?"

A ramshackle trolley swayed by on screaming wheels. She saw the dead-eyed faces of its passengers mottled and pocked by the flyspecked glass. A radio made a loud sound from above, it was tuned hopelessly on two stations at once, a man was shouting didactically the virtues of an all-in-one vitamin pill against the jamming notes of a sweet and low string ensemble amplified beyond all reason. The grey sky was congealed with snow and yet nothing fell.

"Oh, oh, ooooooh," suddenly she began to cry, rage's tears not sorrow's, but Herbert Schwartz seeing the tears and seeing also for the first time the black mourning dress, black stockings and black veil—how were any of them to know that these trappings were premature, even she was not really certain—gave over and morosely nosed his cab back into the stream of traffic.

For miles they drove, slipping and bumping on the car tracks down an endless street of little shops, hideous stores, grim private

enterprise in pollulate profusion, the dusty product of a thousand factories, mines and fields jumbled into plate glass windows, fading where the sun struck on brighter days than this, dull objects catering to a thousand needs real and manufactured, and yet on this street of stores, it seemed beyond the realm of wildest possibility that buyers could come and sellers could sell, that any of it could ever be moved or changed or removed.

Above the stores were mostly apartments with an occasional office of doctor or dentist, so dingy that even from below they gave the impression of rusty and soiled surgical instruments, lawyers' offices, mean and vaguely dishonest, the poor rooking the poor with meagre profits. Side streets opened up even more dismal vistas of dilapidated houses, not ruined mansions, but the flimsy, aged remains of buildings cheaply and badly constructed, grudgingly patched, crowded together with littered yards.

And Stephen Albany had chosen this place to die in! It makes me want to laugh. The tears of rage had dried on her cheeks, but she dared not laugh for fear of her touchy driver, and yet she thought if she didn't laugh she'd strangle. She turned her face to the corner and drew her collar up; in the little triangular window as they went by a dark van she caught sight of her mirth convulsed face.

The reason that she had come would surprise them all. It would surprise Herbert Schwartz (no doubt his friends call him Herbie and he's got a heart just as big as all outdoors in front of that impervious back.) She had hurt his feelings with her doubt of his knowledge of directions and touched him with her tears, but how she could bring down his comfortable concepts of wifeliness and brave little widows if she told him her errand.

Likewise Alan Bannington, Stephen's oldest friend, would be shocked and stunned at this trip that he had made possible. That clean, good man, Alan Bannington with smooth white hair that covered his head like a little cap. He was very distressed when she came to see him. "I want to know where Stephen is," she had said. "Well," he said, and she knew from the way he said it that he

could tell her and she made up her mind not to leave until he did, "I don't quite know," he said.

"Yes, Alan," she answered quietly and settled into the comfortable chair beside his desk. She looked around the office, and out the window at the fine view of the down-town buildings, memories crowding her mind, dismissed—I have an errand and I will not leave until it is accomplished—gazed at Alan's face, her lips parted, the old knowledge in her that this man had always loved her and always would, bachelor timid, constant and unalterable.

"Really," he was insisting, "I'm not sure at all where Stephen is."

Poor man, distressed and torn, his pink and succulent face curded and puckered like a baby's, his sky blue eyes vaguely focused at best, abstractedly wandered disconsolately about the room looking at the Currier and Ives prints on the wall, looking at the ceiling, out the window, at the carpet, at the top of his splendidly bare desk, looking anywhere except at the pale, slender woman, no longer beautiful but handsome still. Once he had given her his love without ever any hope of acknowledgment or return—she was the wife of the man he most admired of anyone in the world—he had granted her his unstinted devotion that he was no more capable of withdrawing or changing than his standing order to his London tailor.

Stephen had said, "I don't ever want to see her again, not as long as I live. Even if she comes and begs you for my address, you must not tell her, Alan, you must not! Not if she begs you on bended knee. I will not see her, I will not, do you understand!"

Bannington knew well enough the horrifying story of this woman's implacable anger that scattered to the winds the children of Stephen's first marriage, and then turned Medea-like upon her own daughter. Stephen said, I am guilty too. God knows, but because I am not without sin shall I countenance this frightfulness! Poor Bannington could no more imagine guilt in his friend than he could the malevolence in the wife. He partitioned off what he knew in neat compartments, it cost him too much to condemn

and so he would not, the woman remained as good as she was beautiful, his friend remained admirable, and the disaster that had overtaken that house was the workings of a malicious fortune.

"In fact," Alan continued—he studied the way the green blotter fitted into the triangular leather corner holder—"In fact, Jessica, I couldn't really tell you where to look for Stephen."

She ran her tongue over the points of her teeth, they were as white and sharp as a kitten's; the look in her eye that had been fierce and commanding became soft and wistful.

Alan Bannington in any case was easily deluded and now with what insights he had deliberately ignored he could not possibly see through the artfulness and deceits of his idolized Jessica.

She drooped her eyes pathetically and conveyed sorrow into her voice, "Stephen is dying and I am his wife . . ." She lifted a dainty handkerchief to her face.

"Can't you understand, Alan! Oh no, I'm quite insane to hope that anyone would understand. I hardly begin to understand myself, and then only a part, or 'v a little. I have been cruel and selfish. All my life, I guess. I only understand my own pain and agony, I suppose . . . it doesn't matter, I mean, what I went through doesn't matter now at all, believ. me, Alan!"

He arose and stood behind her chair, deeply troubled, touched by her emotion, helpless before it. "There," he said, "I think I understand."

She clenched her hands. "Alan, there was so much terribleness and bitterness. I can't tell you. I can't ever forgive myself. And who knows if I'll ever see Stephen again. Perhaps it's too late already. I want to go to him, Alan. He's dying. Shall I tell you how I heard that? I am his wife, Alan, and I was the last to hear, I heard by accident. Oh, I am to blame. I am so much to blame, I admit that. I am the first to admit . . . oh . . . oh . . ."

"Jessica, Jessica!" He patted her shoulder awkwardly and his watch stem caught in the veiling of her hat. "Jessica!" he said again, gently trying to disengage it.

"I didn't know and now it's too late. I was so young and ignor-

ant, but ignorance is no excuse. I cannot forgive myself. I can't even ask Stephen's forgiveness . . . I can only go . . . oh . . . oh . . . go to him."

She raised her beautiful, tearfilled eyes to his, "But if I can only see him again. I loved him not wisely but too well . . . Alan what a penance to go to him dying in another woman's arms, and I drove him to her, she has been kind to him where I could only be bitter, but Alan, I have loved him more than anyone could ever know and now it is too late, let me go to him, Alan. I beg you, I beg you, Alan . . . Alan, you know what it is to love . . ."

Alan Bannington could not resist her. He was doomed the moment she had entered the room, and who am I, he asked himself to judge and harden my heart against her.

She could get the name of Stephen's club from Miss Spenser in the front office, that was as much as he knew, it was as much as he could do for her beyond telling Miss Spenser to release the address. Surely at the club she would be able to find out where Stephen was.

He was sorry the moment he had finished talking to Miss Spenser. "Alan, not even if she begs you on bended knees for my address must you give it to her," the frantic demand rang in his ears. Jessica pressed his hand in gratitude. "Alan, I'll never forget it, I never will."

The carpeting on the floor was thick, there was no sound of the clacking of her heels when she went out. Just the same Miss Spenser gave her a strange look, saying, "Just a minute, just a minute, Mrs. Albany, I'll find that address for you."

Looking at that sallow secretary's face, noting the typical, fussy, awkward movements of a woman who grows old behind a typewriter, worn out not by the sacraments of life but by the meaningless rites of Dear Sir and Yours truly, a sapless remnant, clad in an unbecoming tailored suit and heavy glasses and godawful insipid costume jewelry, leafing dryly through the cards in a black metal box, selected the correct one and looked up, a mixture of

horrified curiosity and outrage in those brown, green flecked eyes that were pinpointed against the lenses.

"Mr. Albany is seriously ill," Jessica said defensively.

"Yes." The woman was too awkward and too repressed to say more than that, hissing the "s" somewhat as she spoke.

"He's dying. Dying I tell you, dying," her voice rose hysterically, partly assumed, partly real, for although the woman had been ordered to release the precious address and would do so, and presumably there was nothing else that she was useful for, Jessica had the egoist's insatiable need for universal sympathy. "My husband is dying," she said again with crushed wonder. The expression on her face was that of one who in actuality views the crumbled ruins of her life, who sees the corpse of the beloved stretched out upon a bier.

Miss Spenser did not rise to it. Her frowning eyes after that first glance never left the card she held in her hand. "Yes," she said again and finally, "Dr. Albany was a fine man." Period. Her hard, expressionless face did not alter in the slightest. The voice said, "Dr. Albany was a fine man," the voice went on to give the address of the club, that's what she was paid for, to do as she was told, and the "Dr. Albany was a fine man," was not polite or impolite, simply meaningless as an elevator operator's remarks on the weather to his regular passengers.

"Thank you very much, Miss Spenser."

The two women faced each other a moment more, Mrs. Albany was forced to look away first. She should be fired, I'll see to it that she's fired. I'll go to Alan. One day I'll go to Alan and he'll do it for me, yes, he'll do it for me, the little piece of dirt!

Going down the long, marble floored hall, turning the corner and waiting for the elevator, pressing the button as though she would force a hole in it, pacing back and forth before the solidly closed doors of it, it came at last filled with office workers who smelled of ink and carbon paper and rubber bands, to woosh her down twelve stories to the lobby, infernally hot and odorous of chocolate and tinfoil and tobacco and newspapers of the stand

next to the door, out through the heavy, revolving mechanism into the congealed cold of the street.

Then to Stephen's club and the humiliating nightmare to be continued. This is the coin I pay for his death. She bit the inside of her lip and the pain thrilled in her mouth with the salt of blood. His particular genius was to fetch me from decency to degradation, from hope to anguish, I'm not to be surprised that at his very death I am forced to a thousand unnatural horrors on this day.

Among which was Herbert Schwartz and his, "Well, do you want to get out or don't you?" into the wilderness. One could say it would be impossible to foresee such rudeness, but on the other hand the unpleasant incident fitted in so patly with all the rest, all the rest that was to come, the meeting quite unavoidable with "that woman" and the children perhaps, three of them she had been told, messy, pale slum children they would probably be, badly brought up and rude and staring, not to mention "that creature," their mother, dyed hair she would have and a dark part. She'd skip it in her mind and while riding still more deeply into it imagine herself back in her comfortable room, bathed and changed into her negligee, lying stretched out on the satin pillows of the chaise longue, lulled and calmed by the sedatives, conscious then only of her comfortableness, yearning only for this, the desire as overpowering as a thirst or hunger, and all the while insectlike creeping minutely through the horrors of the day, perfectly fitted and matched, the lovingly detailed schedule of a diligent fiend.

"Stephen Albany."

The doorman nodded towards the desk at the back of the huge dark room. Obtrusively masculine the place was complete with antlers and archaic firearms on the oak wainscoted walls. "You'll have to inquire at the desk, Miss." He had pulled open the heavy door for her and now his arm pointed stiffly across the room. For a moment she could see nothing except stupidly enough the heavy, grey cloth of his sleeve decorated with gold piping, then she started in the direction of his pointing. There were little pools of dim light spaced over the floor from heavily shaded lamps and

mountains of leather furniture. At this time of day the place was almost deserted though she did have to press rather closely by a group of red faced bovine men in handprinted ties who were roaring at a joke.

The "desk" was set in an alcove as in a hotel and was presided over by a white haired, uniformed fuddyduddy with peculiar eyes, their pupils apparently permanently over-extended like a mine pony's from the years of dim lighting.

"I'm sorry, Dr. Albany isn't in. No, we don't know when he will return." The bleached-out hands held a pencil by its point and softly bounced the rubbered end against the counter.

"But it's imperative that I find him. I'm Mrs. Albany."

"I'm very sorry, Mrs. Albany, but we have no information."

"I want to speak to the manager."

"Very well." And there he stood as unmoving as a woolly sheep and the men behind her were roaring again and slapping their sides with merriment.

"Well!" She demanded with rising exasperation.

The man blinked unhappily. Well, she'd have to wait, it came out finally, the manager wasn't in but he was expected back shortly. And so she waited, settling down in one of the tremendous leather easy chairs, sinking into a hollow big enough to accommodate a two-hundred-pound man, drawing herself together and avoiding as best she could the leather and its "rugged" smell, withdrawing in spirit too, waiting not a short time but what seemed an endless time in distress till at last the manager returned, mercifully a bright man and mercifully a dishonest man with black, tightly curled hair and a face that was full of lumps and hollows.

Money, a bribe, she could produce more quickly than tears, and so it was only a moment more till she was once again in the street, and hailing a cab, dictated from the precious paper she held in her hand the address to which she wanted to go.

Passing down the endless street of stores, thinking, it is as though Stephen had had all this in mind long ago to humiliate me and torture me. So she built a wall of grievances against the greatest

grievance of them all, this visit that she would pay to her dying husband.

Then Herbert Schwartz swung his taxi around, crazily careening around a slowly starting delivery truck, narrowly missing a woman with a baby carriage, the lamp post with its weathered street sign, Orchard Road raced backwards by, the ugly, identical row of houses distinguished only by the descending numbers, 102, 100, 98, 96 . . . , she had no time to count, clinging to the leather strap, she'd almost been thrown from her seat when the taxi had turned, in the seventies now, 78, 76, 74 . . . the window-eyes stared into the mean street with the remorseless spy-curiousness of poverty at the taxi, certainly not a particularly new or grand conveyance, but a vehicle that had been hired and cost money and was therefore unique, it drew up before the door and Mrs. Albany was getting out and telling the cab to wait. "I may be some time, but wait, I'll make it worth your while."

And through the grassless muddy yard she went, and up the sagging steps, she was knocking at the door, then found the bell and rang it. The street watched her, the house contained mortal sickness, that was known up and down the street, and if this visitation from the strangely well-dressed woman who kept the taxi waiting was one more calamity upon this house, the street would watch, steadily, never missing a trick.

A tall, plain woman of about forty-five opened the door. It's Antoinette Wilson's sister, the one who used to live in Newark, N.J., who's come to stay with her since her Dr. Albany got so sick.

She only opened the door a little, as one who would close it quickly if the caller should prove to be an enemy. She was so impressed by the stranger's fine clothes that she hesitated, and Mrs. Albany pushed by her into the room.

The strange house of Antoinette Wilson. A shambles of expensive objects crowded into the mean little rooms, handsome things that Stephen obviously had bought for her, hideous, department store furniture that she had picked herself. All of it dirty and dis-

arranged. Clothes, newspapers, cheap magazines piled everywhere.

"I want to see Stephen Albany."

"Who is it, May?" a woman's voice from within. And May, that's what her name was, big boned and awkward, wagged her head helplessly from side to side and squinted out of a cast eye.

"Yes, just who did you say you were?"

Smells. Of cooking from this house or from the houses next door or backed up against it in the rear. Of children, nursery smells of sour milk and soiled diapers. Sick room smells. Perfumery smells, the odour of the new carpet and new furniture, and the old ineradicable smell of the walls and the street and poverty.

"Stephen Albany," she was murmuring, "Mrs. Stephen Albany."

The woman before her recoiled and the squinting eyes blinked with astonishment and rising anger. The ugly mouth pressed itself into a hard little line, and suddenly the voice was rising out of her shrill and harsh, "Toni, Toni, come here quick!" Turned her outraged face once more upon Mrs. Albany, "Well, of all the colossal nerve! Imagine! *You* comin' *here*!" Then, "Hey, Toni, come 'ere quick, I tol' you." Never permitting the squinting, cast eyes to leave her face as though she held the caller there by her gaze, though by now she had backed away and was standing close to the inner door.

She had been wrong. Antoinette Wilson did not have bleached blonde hair. It was a rich and lustrous dark brown, thick and naturally curly, her face was handsome also, though at this point she wasn't taking care of herself, her hair straggled on her neck and the makeup she wore had not been renewed since morning giving her a faded, wan aspect that had nothing to do with age or health.

Badly dressed in a soiled, sloppy, silk print wrapper, nevertheless nothing could diminish the glory of her beautiful body. It had that eternal, rich quality of fat lands under a benign sun; it was sweet as a fruit is sweet, incorruptible, bawdiness and lascivious indulgence could not touch it, motherhood and maturity had en-

hanced her beauty, not sprung it as it might in a lesser being, her figure was the classical answering of all men's yearnings, sloping shoulders and rounded breasts, naturally high, held up by thrusting nature, not art and straps, a slight swelling in the belly, triangular as a cat's face between the long full lines of the hips that were hidden finally in the folds of her skirt.

Two little boys crowded into the room before her and the third, an infant, lay blinking in her arms. She moved across the room and seated herself lazily on the couch. "Gawd," she said to her sister, "it's hot in here, whyancha open a window?" She brushed her hair back from her face and finally glanced at Mrs. Albany who all the while had stood like one frozen near the entrance way, "What can I do for you, Mrs. Albany?"

Stephen has brought me to this, to stand before an insolent harlot. "I want to see my husband," she answered merely. "I've come to see my husband." Oh the shame of it. "I am his wife and I have a right to see him."

Then behind her the sister was talking, the plain one with the mouth that was like a little cruel cut in her face. "His wife, indeed, a fine wife, and she comes here with all that colossal nerve, rich too, look at her fancy dress, and fancy hat, and gloves and shoes, and hanging on to her purse like somebody's going to steal it." (True, quite unconsciously, Mrs. Albany hugged her purse to her side, her arm jamming it against her body and both hands clasped over the top.) "Coming here, paradin' in front of us, 'I want to see my husband,' mimicking the style and accent, 'I am his wife and I have a right to see him.' You ain't got no right to see him, you ain't even got a right to be in this room, or in this house. And that's Gawd's truth!"

The voice stopped for lack of breath, perhaps that was the reason it finally stopped, and one of the children was piping up, echoing, "You ain't got no right to see him, you ain't even got a right to be in this room, or in this house. And that's Gawd's truth!"

Then it was the other one nodding his head and saying babyishly, "Andits Gawgs troof." Uncanny he looked just as David

had then, when he was that age. Not uncanny at all for they were brothers, of course, but just the same identically the baby boy before her, the one whose growing up had been coincident with her disintegrating world, whom she had despised and hated with all her heart, more than Stephen himself.

"Andits Gawgs troof," he said again.

And angry then, angry with a whole life's anger and bitterness and disillusion. I have been ill-used. Stephen has ill-used me and God has ill-used me, and I have ill-used myself, the rage rose up within her, warm, sweet tasting, curiously for one instant she felt pleasantly outside herself and united and complete, speaking in a low voice, hardly more than a whisper, "I will see Stephen," she said. "Where is he?"

The voice was clacking away behind her once more, "... says ... Stephen ... die in peace ... colossal nerve ... Gawd's truth ... here ... in this house ..." broken sentences, not that they weren't continuously spoken, but because she listened not, only the words inside her own head that pulsed like a vein, "I will see Stephen."

"Gawg's troof ..."

"Hush, children ... now you hush ..."

Other voices. Probably they all shouted now. She was shouting, "I want to see Stephen." The room was hot, that handsome smiling face framed with dark hair was rising slowly before her like a loggy balloon and she thought, I want to put my hands out and push it away. The face suddenly went away and she felt herself pushed, the woman behind her screamed.

Then she felt herself falling through the air, not the oven air of the room, but cold air, blasting against her face, wind. And the infernal children were yelling down below, and in a moment she would be among them, below them and the shouting would come down to her from above ...

Antoinette Wilson was standing beside the raised window. There was a red mark on her face where the clasp of the hand bag had grazed her cheek and Mrs. Albany was leaning against the

wall, none the worse, only her hat was a little awry, and escaping hair and the veiling fluttered in the cross draft. The plain sister had sat down on a low chair and was crying her head off, big, coarse sobs shaking her body and moisture streaming unhidden and unchecked from her eyes and nose.

Antoinette took Mrs. Albany's arm, not roughly, but not tenderly either for she was surprisingly strong and drew her down the long hall. It was very narrow and very dark and Mrs. Albany stumbled blindly against bureaus and chairs that stood there, but she was pulled inexorably forward and finally thrust into a small room—it was the largest in the house, but still it was small, she stood beside a bed in which someone lay quite still, eyes closed, he breathed but with slow, far apart breaths, thin and sunken in the wide bed, the form only a slight long ridge under the fantastic red counterpane.

"He's been like that for two weeks now." It was softly said and then she was alone.

"Stephen, Stephen." She sat there on the chair that was next to the bed. His face looked very calm and not so very changed. It was surprising that he looked so much the same. He had never grown old and fat as other men do, nor lost his handsomeness for that had derived not from the thin flesh that stretched so meagrely over the hard bone, but out of that imperishable structure itself, the wide, noble forehead, the long line of the chin, the thin, aquiline nose, and the eyes, closed now, but set ever deeply in their sockets, shaded by heavy brows.

"So it's you, it's really you." Her voice was funny and cracked and she couldn't think of anything more to say. She had rehearsed the things to say to him for years and years and now she could not remember any of it. She folded her hands tightly over her handbag and pressed it into her lap. The chair creaked a little under her.

Nothing. She had come to mock him. It was right. It was only paying him back a little and it would give her ease and relief. For five years she had been thinking of the things to say. A little calmness and peace, it's all she asked. She sat crouched waiting for the

vindictive pleasure to rise in her. There he was, he was dying. "You're dying, Stephen," she said. She felt a faint, prickling sensation in her hands and feet as though they had gone to sleep.

Somewhere in her mind was a picture of him lying small and ugly on his deathbed, his features twisted by illness, the skin roughened and pitted with corruption, she heard him screaming out with pain and raving in frantic terror. Nothing. She smiled wryly, well, I was wrong.

A bottle of syrupy medicine had dribbled out a flaring, half-completed ring of sticky sweetness on the table beside the bed; the bottle itself had been placed elsewhere, but the brown arc remained and suddenly from it rose a logy winter fly, buzzing and hairy and greenish black; it circled in the air a second and then lit on the dying man's forehead.

Mrs. Albany reached her hand out stiffly to wave it away. There that speck, an incarnation of doom, disease and death carrier inevitably making for one who died, casually dishonouring and soiling, and Mrs. Albany standing now and bending over the bed rigid and trembling tried hysterically to wave away the fly, it would not be waved away, like a protuberance on the wan face it stopped and stayed, its thousand eyes blind to the waving hand; the black beard proboscis probed and suddenly two eyelash legs in back were raised rubbing themselves together and against the wings.

Finally she brushed against her husband's face and the fly at last dislodged, rose drunkenly in the air, zigzagged across the room, bumped against the window. The man opened his eyes suddenly, the lids drawing back with them the coluds of unconsciousness and murk, understanding momentarily focussed the dark gaze. It vanished in an instant.

Then suddenly it was released in her, as though there were inside of her a little door, a trap that had opened, she leaned forward, her lips moving, "Stephen, Stephen," but no sound came, only a faint whisper of air hissing as she breathed, dumbly speaking thus to the man whose ears were stoppered up with death.

I have loved you Stephen. All these years. Isn't it strange. One goes on loving, even when it's too late, one goes on loving, you know. I thought I had to root it out of my heart, that love, because of everything that had happened I thought I must stop loving you. I would be angry and I would be full of despair and sometimes I could banish the anger with despair. And that was for five years, the anger and the despair, and I thought that sometimes between one and the other the love would stop. That I would cease loving.

I think that you loved me more than the others. More than all the others and their children. I think you loved me most of all and that's why I never could stop my own love.

I wonder what he's dreaming about now. I wonder do they have any dreams when they're like that.

My God, why have I loved you so much! You were a poor thing to love.

You didn't even know the meaning of love. You never knew how to love. You were like a little child taking love as though it were your right and not giving back anything at all. You didn't know what it was to hope, you didn't know what it was to be disappointed. You asked for my forgiveness thousands of times and I forgave you, but you didn't know what it was to be forgiven.

You knew I loved you and so you thought you could do anything you wanted and I would always have to be forbearing and patient and forgiving, and you didn't know that after a while my loving you would make me sick and bitter and distracted. You don't know what you did to me. You never had the slightest idea what you were doing to me.

But I loved you dearly, and I never stopped. I never stopped for a minute, for a second. Sometimes I would dream about you and for a whole day I would be happy because of my dream. It sounds silly, that a little thing like that could make me happy. I thought I would never be happy again and then just because of a dream that was in my own head, seeing your sweet image while I slept, and I would be happy.

Sometimes, I would think I saw you in the street. It would turn out to be a stranger and he wouldn't really look like you at all, and I would think he isn't really as handsome as my Stephen. Stephen is much taller and much more distinguished looking. I would turn and look after the stranger, thinking, he really doesn't look like Stephen, but the way he holds his head, a little backwards when he walks along, as though he were glancing up at the sky, that reminds me of Stephen.

I used to wonder if you ever thought of me. Whether you ever thought nice things about me, whether you ever remembered the old times that were so nice. I used to think that if I thought about them, perhaps you would too. I liked to think of my thoughts going through the air to wherever you were and making you think about me . . .

Oh, it is a terrible thing to love so much. So it consumes you. So that your whole life is lost in loving. It is a bitter thing and an angry thing. Yes, I became angry and bitter. You were so selfish and so heedless to make me love you when all you wanted was something ugly and dirty. When you never really loved me at all. You would hold me in your arms and you wouldn't even know I was there. You wouldn't even know what to say to me when you saw me, and you bored me so. I remember being so bored when I was with you that I thought I would die.

It never occurred to you how boring and dull you were. All you wanted were new conquests. You thought I didn't know. All you wanted was to charm people and use them and then throw them away like old cast off garments when you were through with them. I began by loving you and I ended by hating you and despising you.

All the grandeur that you ever had was just inside my head. You were nothing, nothing at all except what I thought. Sometimes it seemed as though I had imagined you entirely. I used to look at the children and wonder who they were or where they had come from, because you didn't exist at all. And people would call me Mrs. Albany. I would laugh and wonder how I came to

have that name. I was Jessica Strait and why did people call me by an imaginary name.

I was stupid and foolish ever to have married you. I have told myself that over and over again. I did not even want to marry you when I did. I did not love you enough to marry you. I didn't love you at all. Do you understand that? Do you know why I married you finally? It was for money. I knew that money's a good thing to have and I knew that you had lots of it.

You see I didn't really love you, I just wanted the money. People are fools who say that money isn't important. It's love that isn't important. People can't live on love and they can live without it for years and years. I have always lived without love. But I have been punished for marrying you, it is because I married you, not because I married you for money.

Because, after all I did love you. I couldn't have lived without loving you. I couldn't have lived all those years knowing how dull and unimportant you really were, I had to pretend to myself that you were good and noble and grand. Even when I could see you as you really were, petty and mean and selfish and dull and stupid, I clung to that other image, the one that I knew wasn't true, because I needed it to go on loving.

And then comes the despair. The anger passes and the despair comes.

And I've gone on loving all these years. I thought that one day you would come to me again and everything would be nice again and decent. I thought that I would be rewarded for loving you so much. I didn't ask for a very big reward, I just wanted you to come and sit beside me and smile. I wanted everything to be very quiet and calm. It wasn't very much to ask, just a little peace and serenity.

I would have been angry and then bit by bit the anger was taken away and I would become sad. I would think of the things I had thought of in anger and that they were false, I would think of the false things I had told myself and I would be sorry and sad. I would get desperate I'd be so sad. I would think that I was losing

my mind. I would take one of the pills that the doctor had given me but I would be crying. I couldn't stop crying. I used to think I would go blind from crying. And all I asked for was a little peace and quiet.

I wanted you to give some sign that you knew and understood. Some little tiny sign. I used to lie there with the tears running down my cheeks wondering what kind of a sign you should give. If you should walk in that minute what I would want you to do to show me. Because long before I knew there was nothing you could say and nothing you could do that would help at all. But I used to lie there wondering what it was I wanted you to say and to do, so that I could have a little calmness and peace . . .

She sat dry eyed in the deepening short winter afternoon. She could hear the others in the house, though they were keeping quiet, and the street noises came through muffled by the closed windows. The man on the bed never moved or changed, merely the shadows darkened over him as the light faded. Then for a moment she had her little calmness and peace, it came to her in Antoinette Wilson's house, lost and degraded beside the death-bed, the lovely calmness and peace.

Then it was gone. She looked up: the little boy, the younger one was standing in the doorway. He was keeping quiet, but he was watching her, standing sideways, one plump, bare leg extended into the room, his mouth was open and he breathed through it with his chin held up, his dark eyes never left her face.

"What are you doing here!"

One of his hands that had been hidden in the shadow rose to his face and he started nibbling-sucking at the knuckle of his thumb. He looked away from her towards the bed and then back again, not answering a word.

She got up and went towards him, but he instantly turned and ran with clattering flat baby shoe steps down the hall. She followed after. All I asked, a little peace, a little calm.

Now she was shouting it aloud, "All I asked was a little peace, a little calmness." The child was hiding behind his mother. "Won't I ever have a little peace and quiet. God, it's little enough to ask!"

Then she was saying at the top of her lungs, she couldn't help it, "You, you . . . you can keep him. I don't ever want to see him again. He can die here for all I care. But when he's dead I'll come and take him away. I want him after he's dead, you understand! I'm going to come here every day and when he's dead, I'm taking him. You understand that. He's mine then and I'll take him. You understand that! You understand that!"

Antoinette Wilson shrugged impatiently and turned her big hands so that her white palms were up. She had repaired her makeup and combed her hair, the face was beautiful once more and without a hint of anger or dismay.

"And it's Gawg's troof," remarked the little boy, rolling it in his mouth with wondering and delight. The mother's hand dropped on his head. "Hush now."

Inexorably the face followed her to the door.

"I'll come back and take him, you understand!"

No smile, no frown, merely a face quite blank with wide, in-curious eyes and then the door closing on her. "Of all the colossal nerve," she heard that other voice screaming out, but only a murmurous answer.

"Mama, do we have to keep quiet any more?"

The window above her was still open wide.

"Can I go see if Daddy's awake yet, Mama, can I do that?"

"I was there and he didn't move and the lady was there and she came after me."

The voices were very high. High and gibbering, higher than even children's voices could be. She drew her coat closer around her and ran across the yard to the waiting taxi and the voices followed her, little squeaking sounds, tiny pipings but there weren't any words in it any more.

Every day she went back. Every day until he died, she returned bringing a maid with her, however, whom she sent in to see if he

lived or died. Then she arranged to go there, driving out behind the hearse and took him away to the cemetery of the town where they had lived when they were married. She raised a decent stone to him of massive Vermont marble with brass lettering, his name and dates, beloved husband of Jessica Albany. She continued wearing a black dress and hired three lawyers to contest his will.

But it's a long time since then, ten years, marked on the calendar and Mrs. Albany tells her housekeeper, "I don't remember much. I hardly remember anything. It's all these years."

"I remember it like it was yesterday that my Bob died though it's twenty years and more, Missus. But it's like you say, some of the things get kind of mixed up. People tell you things that happened and maybe they did but you kind of disremember."

But she was thinking to herself, "The old missus, she hasn't forgotten a thing, but it hur-- her remembering and talkin'." So pretty soon she's changing the subject, talking about Mr. Poco who's the most intelligent parrot in the world or the trouble she had getting sugar at the store. "Why Bud, he's the grocer, he says to me, 'Mrs. Tandy, I'm plum out of sugar, but I'll have some later on in the day.' And I says, 'Bud, you know I can't be running back and forth to the store all day buying things. How come you're out of sugar. Folks hoarding again?' 'Yep,' he says, 'folks read the paper and get real discouraged about the state of the world so the first thing they do is go out and buy everything in sight.'

"I can't blame 'em," I says, 'the world shore is discouraging.'

"But you know with sugar, it gets hard like a rock and then after a while they bring it back and want me to take it. It's not like the world isn't discouraging just the same, but the sugar's gotten so hard."

"Well, Bud, you can't win nowadays. In the old days it was different, you could be thrifty and all against the future but now it's hoarding and you're not supposed to do it. So I thank my

lucky stars I'm getting old and don't have to worry so much longer.'

"But the thing is, I had to go back three times before I could get any sugar, Missus."

The day is a foggy one, for a while it looks as if the sun might come out, but then the mists close in again, and Mrs. Albany was feeling poorly and didn't get up out of bed until after lunch. "I don't know why I should feel bad today, except maybe it's the weather," she said and lay there too listless to read even or turn on the radio. The calendar with the red mark on it hung above her head and from time to time she looked up at it.

When Mrs. Tandy brought her her egg, fixed fancy like she liked it in a little clear crystal bowl with a lace doily underneath on a Dresden china plate with little pieces of buttered toast with the crusts cut off, she just poked at the egg with the spoon and only nibbled at one of the pieces of toast.

"Come on, Missus, eat a bit more, it'll make you feel better."

"Thank you, Mrs. Tandy, but I'd rather not." She glanced up at the calendar ("It's a look that wrung my heart, it did," Mrs. Tandy told Jerry later when she was getting her lemon juice and whiskey. "Ten years," she said, "and the estate isn't yet settled. It's all going to lawyers, they're eating it up, Jerry. You'd think children wouldn't grudge their mother what's rightfully hers, wouldn't you. I don't blame poor little Dissy so much, she doesn't know what she's doing, and she's in the hands of that shyster crook, but that David, he's bad and wicked right from the beginning. And you know that chorus girl mistress that Dr. Albany had, it's kind of a scandal and all, Jerry, so keep it quiet, will ya, she got that poor dying man to give her the money outright and sign over notes to her and all. The Missus had three lawyers but they couldn't do a thing about it. But in the end the Missus stands to get a lot of money, only I hope and pray she don't get any more furniture, Jerry, I swear, I don't know where we'd put it, if she got any more furniture.")

Mrs. Albany looked at the parrot and thought he had bugs.

"Look at him scratch and pick at himself, Mrs. Tandy. Can't you put some powder on him?"

"He just does that to pass the time, Missus. He's just as clean as you or me."

"Bring his cage over to me a minute." The bird fluttered wildly and shrieked as if he were being killed, when his cage was moved, he also managed to nip one of Mrs. Tandy's fingers, hard, so it bled.

But Mrs. Albany saw a little black something on his back that she thought was a bug and even though Mrs. Tandy thought it was just a little piece of dirt or something off his feathers, there was nothing for it but for Mrs. Tandy to climb wearily up to the second floor and fetch the powder and dust him off and a little while later Mrs. Albany interrupted the housekeeper in the middle of fixing lunch to dust him off again, because he was still scratching.

In the early afternoon the clouds began to lift somewhat so Mrs. Tandy went outdoors to hang out the clothes. Mrs. Albany said she thought the weather wasn't ever going to clear, but Mrs. Tandy was quite certain that it would. When she'd been out a little while—the weather became undeniably brighter, and Mrs. Albany with a good lunch inside her, creamed chicken and little new peas and parsley potatoes, rolls and honey and two cups of jasmine tea, began to feel much better herself.

Mr. Poco was looking very solemn and his green feathers a little faded by the powder, ruffled up and annoyed with his head sink between his shoulders.

"Mr. Poco," Mrs. Albany said cheerily to him, but he didn't answer, he didn't even deign to turn his head.

She threw him a piece of cracker, it bounced off his back and fell to the floor of his cage. Finally he climbed down and got it.

"Mr. Poco!" She was sitting up in bed with shining, mischievous eyes, and then when he looked at her hopefully for another piece of cracker, she held one up for him to see and began calling very softly, so only he could hear, but that the sound wouldn't

carry across the room. "Mrs. Tandy, Mrs. Tandy!" and waved the cracker temptingly back and forth.

The three dogs pricked up their ears watching her. "Mrs. Tandy!" Mr. Poco finally obliged. She threw him a second piece of cracker. He became excited then, flapping his wings and walking sideways back and forth on his perch. "Mrs. Tandy! Mrs. Tandy!" Piercing loud parrot shrieks. On and on, from time to time Mrs. Albany gave him another piece of cracker. She rocked back and forth on the bed excitedly clapping her hands together, laughing and laughing.

Finally, Mrs. Tandy, thus summoned, arrived, sweating and out of breath. "Lor', it's that parrot critter again!" she began angrily. "I swear one of these days I'm gonna wring his fool neck and pluck and draw him and serve him up for supper, I am."

"Oh, Mrs. Tandy," she said between giggles, "It was Mr. Poco and you thought it was me!"

"Aye, I thought it was you callin' me, Missus, and I came clear in."

"Mrs. Tandy, Mrs. Tandy," the parrot continued the call wildly.

"And you had the funniest expression on your face, when you saw it was just Mr. Poco. One of these days when that happens I think I'm just going to die laughing. It'll be the death of me."

"Missus, if that pesky parrot don't quit playing these tricks, it'll be the death of Annie Tandy, so help me," she muttered darkly.

"Well, Mrs. Tandy," said her mistress soothingly, "since you're here, you might help me to get up. I think Mr. Poco was thinking it's time I was getting up so that's why he called you."

"All righty, Missus. As a matter of fact, I've finished hanging up the clothes and the sun's out so they'll dry nice and white. Now what would you like to wear today?"

There wasn't much choice, but it was always a question, and Mrs. Albany always wore something a little different each day, maybe only a different scarf or a different brooch, or a different shawl, but it helped to make the days seem different. Today because of the sad anniversary she dressed all in black, but she was

feeling very chipper and cheerful when she got in her chair and went wheeling clear across the room to look at the commode with panels of Japanese lacquer and ormolu mountings. One of the legs had been broken when it was shipped here by freight. The railway company had paid to have it very cleverly restored, but the sea air had begun to eat at the crack and Mrs. Albany wanted to keep an eye on it.

The dogs got into a big free-for-all fight in the middle of the afternoon. Shep started it by snapping at Pinkie, she was the irritable one, but Spot was almost as nervy and flew at her throat. Pinkie joined in with gusto, yelping and howling and nipping where she could, the fight was first Pinkie and Spot against Shep, then the two police dogs ganged up on the smaller one and chased her up and down between the rows of furniture. It took Mrs. Albany cornering them with her wheelchair and Mrs. Tandy both to break it up, and Mrs. Tandy got bitten on the same finger that Mr. Poco had nipped in the morning. They tied up the two police dogs and made Pinkie lie in the corner in disgrace, but for a long time the dogs continued to yelp and snarl at one another.

Mrs. Tandy went out to do the marketing, returned to fix supper and a little before sundown left for the day. Mrs. Albany went out to sit on the porch for a bit and watch the sunset. She hung Mr. Poco's cage beside the open window so he could get some air, and the dogs having been fed were quieter now and reconciled to each others' company. Spot, however, was restless, and kept padding back and forth the length of the porch.

When Mrs. Albany saw a young man walking out on the dunes she called to him to ask him to take Spot for a walk. The dogs knew immediately that something was wrong and set to growling and barking.

"Young man, young man," she called and could hardly hear her own voice.

"Young man, young man," she cried again and suddenly behind her Mr. Poco started in screeching, "Young man, young man!"

There were scuffings from the dogs and yelps and squeals, she didn't know how she was going to hold Spot back on the stone leather leash, it seemed as if she'd pull her clear off the poor wheelchair and all.

"Young man, young man," she called out in despair. Mr. Poot was screaming wordless parrot sounds, and then he began squawking an insane, "Polly, Polly, Polly!"

She handed the young man Spot's leash and watched her pull him forward down the path. The dog squatted on the sand, it's what she wanted, to relieve herself, that had made her so restless. It was impossible to quiet the other dogs, they kept barking and yelping. "Make sure that she does everything," Mrs. Albany called out. That good-for-nothing Mrs. Tandy doesn't even bother to see that they do everything. "Walk her to the gate."

He opened the mailbox and took a letter out. That good-for-nothing Mrs. Tandy forgets half the time to even look for mail.

("Oh Jerry," Mrs. Tandy told her friend, "she gets the awful letters from that crazy daughter of hers. She tears them up sometimes or sometimes she sends them back without opening them, but it upsets her to get those letters, I can tell. I don't give them to her until she's in a real good mood, you know, but even so it upsets her. Jerry, I'm troubled in mind, there's been one of those letters waiting for her for a week now, a big fat letter and I haven't dared give it to her yet.")

He opened the mailbox and took a letter out . . . but it was only a letter from poor, crazy Dissy, she didn't want to read it.

"I know you, Mrs. Albany."

He was leaning over her saying that. "I know you, Mrs. Albany. I know you, Mrs. Albany," as if he were out of his mind. Over and over. She stared up into his face, his breath stank of alcohol, and the sun glinted in his pale blue eyes as he leaned over her, his face was red but as she looked it whitened, "I know you, Mrs. Albany," he was saying, thrusting out the letter towards her. No, she didn't want it.

Then he was talking about David Albany. He was a friend

David Albany's, ~~it~~ was hard to make out, he spoke so strangely and wildly, but she didn't know what had become of David Albany, she thought he might have committed a crime and changed his name. He was a terrible man, David Albany, a bad one from the beginning, he would be capable of anything.

"I am David Albany." He grinned at her horribly and the sun shone sideways through his eyes, the gleaming light entering at the back and shining through the dim blue iris. Pinkie sat back on her haunches and howled.

"We shall meet again, Mrs. Albany," he shouted at her as he stumbled at the gate.

"Mrs. Tandy, Mrs. Tandy," she called her on the telephone. But she had to talk first to that dumb Edna and then to her husband, John Everett before she could ever get to speak to Mrs. Tandy. "Mrs. Tandy, Mrs. Tandy, something terrible has happened. He's come back. That David Albany's come back. Come and stay with me, Annie. I'm frightened, Annie. I saw him, I saw that David Albany today, and Annie come and stay with me. He means to murder me, I know it, I saw him and I know that's what he means to do.

"I'm frightened, Annie, and afraid. I don't want to die, Annie, be murdered like that, in my bed. He'll be back to murder me in my bed, Annie, so come and stay with me, Annie, please, Annie, please, please!"

Chapter 3

DISSY was holding her purse very tightly in her lap. It was soft and smooth old calfskin with a gold coloured metal clasp. She could see the metal part shining in the dim light of the movie house, but she couldn't see the colour of the leather which was green. The purse was very thin because it was practically empty. All she carried in it were a handkerchief and some photographs. There was one of Maidie and one of Father and one of everybody that was taken when she was very young and she was sitting in Mother's arms. She always liked to have the picture with her although carrying them around had made them fade and wrinkle.

Also there was exactly sixteen cents which was the change from the dollar bill after she had bought the ticket to the movie. Eighty-four cents seems like a lot to spend especially since she didn't particularly enjoy going, but Vivian Shaw and Bibi Martin had wanted to and she didn't want to spoil their fun. Besides it was good to get away from Sunnyside for a while and go in a place where she could concentrate. Before, it hadn't mattered where she was, the others were just like everybody else, but now she could see that they were sick and it made her feel so sorry for them and then she couldn't think of anything else except them.

But after she had written the letter she tried to think about them and make plans. Every day when the mail came she would look for a letter from her mother. It was six days that Mother hadn't written or seven if you count today too. Then she had gone to town on Monday and then again on Wednesday and both times she saw the bus that went to Carnival-by-the-Sea which was where Mother lived. She ought to know because she had written

name on envelopes often enough. She liked to think that she could get on the bus and ride down to where Mother was. And she would when Mother wrote to her answering her letter.

Once the bus was standing on the street corner and people were getting on. The other time it was driving down the street.

Dr. Peter said she was much better and soon she would be able to leave Sunnyside for good; she could go into town now, if she wanted with Vivian and Bibi who were patients too which was different than going with Miss Coles. Of course they didn't know that she was going to run away if Mother didn't write soon.

Dissy stared at the gold looking clasp on her purse that shone in the darkness. She was worried about money too. They only let her have just enough to do what she was going to do. If she took a dollar and said she was going to the movies and then didn't go, they would get suspicious. And now all she had was sixteen cents.

She wondered whether she had remembered to bring her comb. That was just about all that was wrong with her, not being able to remember to do things she wanted to do. She was very absent minded. Then also funny, silly things would pop into her head, ideas, that is, that made her laugh and of course she knew the funny, silly things weren't true. But she would like to have remembered to bring a comb because her mother was very particular about wanting her to look nice.

She was much too excited to pay attention to the movie and they had come in after the show had started so she couldn't pick up the story. She was thinking that perhaps she could explain to the driver of the bus that went to Carnival-by-the-Sea that she didn't have any money for the fare but that she would pay him when she got to Mother's. But the bus driver would probably know that she came from Sunnyside and wouldn't let her go. He might report about her and she would lose all her privileges.

She wished that she was tiny and small like a fly so that nobody would notice it when she got on the bus. That was one of those silly, impossible ideas. But maybe Mother would write soon.

Presently she leaned over Vivian and asked Bibi for a cigarette.

"You're not allowed to smoke in here," said Vivian officiously.
"I know. I'll go to the ladies' room."

She had to say "Excuse me" to two people who stood up as she wedged by them sideways. They would think she was crazy to want to leave in the middle of a picture just to smoke a cigarette. But Dr. Peter said she mustn't worry about being crazy anymore, she might always be a little eccentric perhaps, but she could look forward to leading a normal life, a husband even, and children, though for a while she must take things easy. Dr. Peter said things like that, "take things easy," which didn't mean anything very definite, probably. He said that the fact that she had recovered as much as she had was very remarkable for a person of her age. She smiled wryly and thought, it's nice that there's something remarkable about me.

By this time she was out in the lobby opposite a tall mirror and though she was by no means vain she went over and examined herself closely. Her mother used to say, "No woman should ever let go by the opportunity to check her looks in a mirror." Dissatisfied was chiefly worried about her hair which was a pale, silver-blond and very fine. She wore it long and loosely curled which looked very nice when it was freshly combed but got to hanging in messy strands very quickly. She tried not very successfully to smooth it with her fingers.

She was a small, slender girl with a very light complexion and blue eyes. She was much prettier than she looked to herself in the mirror because then her mouth had an odd way of turning down at the corners, or pressing itself into a mirthless, fixed smile that robbed her of all attractiveness. At other times when she felt at ease and unselfconscious she possessed a rare, sweet beauty, touching reminder of what might have been with the frail, fair promise of what might yet be.

This day she was wearing a light green dress and a three-quarter length teddy bear coat, but in spite of the chilliness of the season she wore no stockings, nor gloves, nor hat. In the depths of the mirror, actually from behind her, she saw the yellow light of

afternoon sunshine. She turned towards it, still holding the unlighted cigarette between her fingers and went out into the street. For the first time since she had been at Sunnyside she was all alone among strangers, people she had never seen and probably would not see again, walking up and down in front of the stores.

She crossed the street in front of the movie house and went slowly up to the next corner stopping every so often to look around curious and pleased. At the corner she could see down to the place where the bus sometimes stopped that said Carnival-by-the-Sea on it. She thought wouldn't it be nice if she could look into her purse and find a bus ticket inside and she could take the bus now when it came. That was just one of those silly ideas because of course, she knew she didn't have a ticket in her purse. All she had was sixteen cents and the photographs and a handkerchief. She passed the corner and went a little further up the street. Some high school boys lounging in front of a candy store whistled at her but she smiled back at them with so much friendliness that they quickly became embarrassed and began to rough-house.

Halfway up the next block the window of a dress shop caught her eye, then a print store, after that some very rich looking chocolate cakes in a bakery. In front of a drugstore, it suddenly occurred to her to buy a comb. She had only sixteen cents but that ought to be enough. It might be just the right amount, or perhaps the combs were just fifteen cents and she would have a penny left over. It was too bad to buy a comb when she already had one at home, but she had forgotten to bring it with her.

Also she had seen how messy she looked in that mirror that was in the lobby of the movie house. She glanced back at the theatre - she wouldn't be able to get back in now. Oh well, that didn't matter, it was much nicer outside walking up and down in the sunshine with the people who she didn't know. She'd wait for Bibi and Vivian outside and tell them how she couldn't get back because she only had sixteen cents.

She looked back at the drugstore window and began thinking maybe they didn't have any combs for fifteen cents, that the

cheapest kind they had were a quarter. She began to chew her lip nervously thinking how it would be.

All the people who were sitting in there at the fountain would turn around and look at her. The man in the grey coat who was waiting on her would say, "What, you only have sixteen cents! Nobody can buy a comb for sixteen cents. Everybody knows that!"

She wouldn't be able to bear having all the people look at her and think, "Everybody knows you can't buy a comb for only sixteen cents! She's crazy not to know that a comb costs twenty-five cents."

The druggist would say, "This woman must be out of her mind not to know that!"

"No, no . . . I—I . . ." she wouldn't know what to say.

"She is out of her mind. She belongs over at Sunnyside, what are you doing here! Tell me that! Tell me that!"

"I'm going to see my mother. I'll go back to Sunnyside, after, I promise but I want to see Mother first!"

(It was strange, she thought of saying that before she thought of running away that day to see her mother. Part of her mind thought how strange it was and another part knew that her mother would never answer her letter and that she would have to run away.)

Only now she was thinking mostly about the cruel people in the drugstore and she had turned and fled up the street. Actually, no one had noticed the girl hesitating at the entrance of the store, nor did anyone see her agitatedly walking along the sidewalk, but when she looked back she saw several people hurrying after her. She turned the corner, and after a moment, they did too. There were more of them, people had come from the other streets and were following her. Panic stricken, she began to run, but it was hopeless, they were running too, she could not go very fast in her high heeled shoes, the low red sun was shining in her eyes. She couldn't see.

Then suddenly, she was surrounded by a mob of shouting,

pushing people. "Mother, Mother!" she cried out desperately. "I'm only going to see my mother and then I'll go back to Sunny-side."

"Yipes!" somebody yelled in her ear, "everybody make your will, Killer Davidson's at the wheel!"

"Where!" Dissy whirled around and faced a tall, swarthy, big bosomed girl who at that moment smiled revealing a row of lower teeth made entirely out of gold. "Yoohoo," shrieked the girl, "Lover boy, save a seat for Kayo, will ya!"

Then she gave Dissy a tremendous shove that would have knocked her down save that she was pressed in on every side, even so she stumbled against a man who grinned at her and pushed her back upright again, "Take it easy, baby, there's room for everybody," he said good naturedly.

"I only want to see Mother. I wrote to her and maybe she has answered my letter and it's in the mail now. I mean maybe I'll get her letter tomorrow."

Somebody else was shouting, "Pick up your big feet, Kayo and quit blocking the door."

Suddenly Dissy realised that there was the bus stopped at the curb, the one that said Carnival-by-the-Sea on the sign over the front, and the crowd of people was getting on. She almost wept with relief, but her lips turned down in a rueful, wry smile that she had been so crazy as to think all these people had been chasing her. Why, she had never even gone into the drugstore and even if she had, it wouldn't have mattered. Crazy ideas, that was all that was wrong with her now, only now she was just about to get on the bus the way she had thought about it, to go and see her mother.

She was swept into the bus like a leaf on a tide. "No, no, I—" she started to say, beginning to fumble with her purse.

"Step to the rear of the bus, please, step to the rear of the bus," the driver bellowed, looking at the others who held out their green commutation tickets. The girl who had said the bus driver was a killer was right behind Dissy, she put her hand in the small of her back and shoved her along between the seats. There was a

young man standing in the aisle, she'd never get by him, Dissy thought, even with the girl pushing her so. "Excuse me, excuse me," she said.

"Drop dead, Malone, why doncha!" roared the girl behind her.

"Turn blue!" said the young man.

Dissy looked fearfully into his dark, wrathful face. "I'm sorry," she said, but of course with everybody stamping and shouting at once, she couldn't possibly make herself heard. Besides the girl had pushed her away.

Now she was stumbling over somebody's feet. "Oh, I beg your pardon," Dissy said.

"Why doncha look where you're going!" a woman was shouting indignantly. Dissy looked at a red, sweaty face and a big mouth opening and shutting saying, "Why doncha look where you're going!" Then she looked in the woman's lap where there was a little wicker basket shaped like a diminutive picnic hamper. And in the basket, Dissy thought spitefully, are two little white mice all curled up together. It made her want to laugh thinking how surprised the woman would be when she opened the basket and saw them there.

It was only a crazy idea, of course, and not true, but it would serve the woman right for shouting so. Dissy passively let herself be shoved clear to the back of the bus and she smiled listening to the woman who was pushing her scream at the other woman, "Why doncha get those piano legs back under the piano where they belong!"

Dissy sat down on the rear seat and pulled her skirt down over her knees. She was very upset and confused and it was so noisy and strange that she couldn't get her thoughts straight. Part of the time she thought she had got the letter from her Mother saying that she could come and that Dr. Peter had explained to the bus driver that it was all right for her to get on the bus. Then she blushed and looked out of the window. None of that was true. What had really happened was that she knew her mother wouldn't write so she had decided to run away. That's what she was doing

right then, *running away*! She pulled nervously at her skirt again. The green dress was a little short for her, even though everybody said it was the prettiest one she had. She was glad she was wearing her pretty dress to see her mother in. She tried to smooth her hair with her hand, remembering again that she had forgotten her comb.

The girl who had been pushing her so, bounced down beside her, "Well, we made it, honey."

"I'm going to see my mother," Dissy told her.

"That's good—whee, yoo-hoo!" Dissy started, but the girl was addressing a sandy haired young man who had just got on the bus. "As I live and breathe and chaw tobaccy ef et ain't old goon faced Myron McKoy—where have youall been keeping yourself, lover boy?"

"Hya Kayo," he said, but he found himself a seat near the front of the bus.

"He's from Arkansas, he hates my guts," Kayo explained cheerfully. "He's a—"

But her words were drowned out by terrifying noises, clankings, squeaks, gnashing of gears, popping explosions from the pneumatic equipment and a rise of stinking carbon vapour; the bus got underway. "We're off, screamed Kayo, "and don't spare the horses, Killer. Oheeeccaaaaah!"

The bus was an ancient vehicle, rickety and touchy as an old woman; everything rattled on it, the doors, the windows, the gears, the wheels; when it managed to reach a speed like forty miles an hour, the engine that was directly below Dissy's seat began to pound alarmingly, moreover, as the bus had apparently been designed for a great, wide, straight highway, every time it hit a bump or came to a bend, it threatened to leave the road. Kayo's yells accompanied each such incident.

Dissy drew her coat more closely around her and gazed out the window but she couldn't help stealing little wondering glances at Kayo's Midas-touched jaw that glittered with every yell and bel-low that she made.

It appeared that Kayo and most the others worked in a factory and used the bus every day to get to their homes; thus they treated it almost as a private car or an extension of their work room. There was great shouting back and forth and between the seats and up and down the aisle; every time the bus stopped to take on or discharge passengers there were howls of farewell and greeting, and Kayo's were the loudest, heartiest and most ribald. She had a hairy upper lip that rose in a little point when she'd bawl to one of the young men some bright obscenity. Then she'd roar with laughter at whatever he answered, slapping her knees. Mainly they were talking about what a hell of a week it had been and what a hell of a weekend was coming up.

Finally Kayo turned to Dissy and said, "You're new, aincha, honey?"

Dissy was worrying that they would find out that she was running away, she was trying to think of what to tell the bus driver so that he wouldn't know that she came from Sunnyside. She realised too late that Kayo was talking to her.

"What? I beg your pardon?"

"Hey, she begs my pardon," whooped Kayo. Still she had a kindly look about her and though Dissy felt considerable alarm, at the same time she began to feel herself drawn to this big horse of a girl. She smiled timidly when Kayo gave her a tremendous buffet on the shoulder and said, "You in Inventory?"

"Uh . . . yes."

"Thought so, hadn't seen you around. Jeez, you know Timmy Sego in Inventory, he's a honey. Always after it, you know, but a real nice fella, clean American boy type, and all that, and his arms, oh baby, so round and firm and fully packed."

"Just his arms, Kayo?" asked a camel-faced girl friend.

"Whoop!" Kayo bellowed with laughter. "You oughta know, Sweetie Pie!"

Then she poked Dissy with a forefinger that was as big as a man's thumb. "Seriously, baby, you oughta fix your hair. Keep it clean and brushed and stuff. Timmy used to say the only reason

he wouldn't kiss me was cause I wouldn't wash my mustache." Everybody laughed uproariously, but Dissy felt humiliated for her new friend. She determined she would look up this Timmy Sego and ask him to be nice to Kayo.

The conversation continued about Timmy's dainty ways then moved on to another absent lover boy who was just the opposite.

"Jeez," remarked Kayo happily, "It says in the advertisement that there are fourteen places on the human body where a person smells, and if ya ain't taken a bath in a week and ya stink in all fourteen, that's when Louis wants ya in his pants."

"You oughta know," said the camel-faced girl maliciously. And Kayo laughed more than all the rest.

For a long while Dissy sat stiffly staring straight ahead. She was very shocked, but it never occurred to her to be disapproving; then oddly she began to feel at ease. She looked from one face to another, ape and god is mixed here, and the divine is the better for the grosser part. This was ass's braying, but the other had been twittering, for so long, small insect raspings, Miss Coles opened her mouth and it was dry twigs being rubbed on glass. Dr. Peter even. Dear Dr. Peter, not all the time, but sometimes . . . chee-cheecheecheechee . . . you must be mistaken, Dissy, to think that . . . and those others, they laughed, pssspssspssspss like steam escaping from a leaky radiator, for years and years and they held her and somebody was saying Dissy is sick.

Kayo jogged her elbow and said, "Ain't that so honey?"

"Oh yes." Whatever it was, it must be true, Kayo said it was.

"Atta girl."

Dissy blushed with pleasure, no one had ever said "Atta girl" to her before. They didn't say she was sick and they didn't mind that she was absent minded some of the time. But she tried to listen to what they were saying. Something about somebody named Foxy or somebody who was foxy, it didn't matter. She felt rarely happy and elated, she leaned back in her seat and looked out the window hoping vaguely to remember this tree, that house, and keep it in her mind always to evoke this moment.

The sun had dropped behind the hills and darkness rose like a mist from the black earth into an intermediate level, luminous and shadowed under the still clear sky. The road twisted and turned according to the dictates of farmers' fields, not nature, there were wire fences that enclosed for the most part grass that rippled under the wind; the earth beside the road was soft and dusty, puffed into the air by the bus's passage.

At last Dissy saw the house she wished to keep. It stood some distance from the road beside a tall tree, it was a modest little building with weathered grey clapboards and a sagging porch, but there was a garden full of blooms in front that showed palely in the twilight and every window was lighted and yellow as from a little sun within.

Dissy closed her eyes so as not to see it fall behind. She felt the bus bucking and jolting under her and swing wide. The motion flung Kayo against her, warm and heavy, pinning her against the side of the bus, then with a quick twist, Kayo righted herself and shouted, "Zowee, Killer did it again!"

Opening her eyes, Dissy saw to her surprise that the house was still there, only this time at a different angle, it hid its garden and its cheerful lights, but the tree stood directly in front of it, noble and tall.

Kayo scrambled to her feet.

"Where are you going?" Dissy asked in alarm.

"Home is where you hang your hat, honey," said Kayo pointing to the house. She grabbed a hand hold as the bus gave a final lunge before it stopped. Dissy wished she could go with the girl, but she remembered that she was going to see her mother.

"Well, see ya Monday, kid!" Kayo thumped her roundly on the shoulder. Idiotically, Dissy could see it herself, and yet she derived a comfort from it, she let the idea stand as reality, the fiction that she, Dissy, did work in Inventory with the dreadful, disdainful Timmy.

"Goodbye, Kayo, I'll see you Monday," Dissy whispered as

the other made her way forward in the bus bawling farewells to all the rest.

The bus ride went on and on. This was one of those meandering lines that double back and forth on a course not very straight to begin with, going miles off the direct route to stop at every hamlet, at every cross road where three houses were together lest some would-be passenger is waiting for a ride.

It had grown quite dark, the interior bus lights were on and now when Dissy sought to look out the window she merely saw a dim reflection of her own face freckled with distant lights. She tried to smooth her hair, sadly remembering that even Kayo had noticed its dishevelment. The other passengers had become much more subdued, one by one they were leaving the bus, those that remained, having further to go, napped or rested open eyed, staring dully straight ahead.

Dissy herself was overcome with sleepiness, the thoughts she had now had the faraway miasmic quality of dreams. Probably they were looking for her by now. Bibi and Vivian must have been very surprised when she hadn't come back and they must have told the others. They were saying, "Where is Dissy? Where did she go?" It didn't matter what they were saying. She wondered vaguely whether Dr. Peter knew. He would make a long face and shake his head the way he always did and she hated it because it meant that he was displeased. But it didn't really matter.

Everybody would have had supper by now and they would be in the recreation room reading or watching television or whatever they wanted. She remembered it so vividly that it almost seemed as if she were there instead of here in the bus going to see her mother.

She was talking to old Mrs. Crosley who thought herself immensely wealthy. Mrs. Crosley liked Dissy because she was so refined. Mrs. Crosley said, "My dear, we are different from every one else, I mean, one can be a natural aristocrat, but money helps." But Mrs. Crosley really had had a very hard life so Dissy tried to be nice to her.

"I would have told you I was going to see my mother, Mrs. Crosley, but I didn't know I was going today."

"My dear, how lovely. But how could one as young as yourself know how much a mother appreciates every little attention."

Just the same, Dissy wondered what her mother would say. "Dissy, I'm so glad you have come." She hoped her mother would be glad like that, that she had come, but even if she weren't it wouldn't make any difference. Because now she was well again. Her mother didn't know that and that's why she wouldn't be glad to see her, but then when she knew she would be glad.

The moon was shining. She must have gone to sleep after all because she didn't realise at first that it was the moon. She thought she was in a cave but she was going towards the entrance where it was very bright, then just as she was waking up she realised it was a dream. I'll have to tell Dr. Peter, she thought, and he'll be glad because I don't have many dreams.

Then she saw that they had stopped on a bluff overlooking the ocean. The moon was shining on the sea and made a long path. She looked around and saw that everybody had got off the bus except herself and the bus driver who had turned around in his seat.

"Hey, Miss, where are you going? Let me see your ticket."

Everything was very quiet with the bus stopped. She had got used to all the noises it made. It was funny. The quiet and the moonlight shining on her face and the bus driver twisted around in his seat looking at her. He wanted to know where she was going and where her ticket was. His name was Killer Davidson, at least that's what Kayo had called him. She was going to tell him that she worked in Inventory with Timmy Sego so he wouldn't know that she came from Sunnyside.

The moon was very pretty shining on the sea. She had forgotten how pretty it was by the ocean when the moon made a path on it, and now when she listened she could hear the waves breaking on the beach. Suddenly she began to cry.

The bus driver had left his seat and was coming towards her.

He had a funny walk because his legs were cramped from driving so long. He was repeating gruffly, "Whe're you supposed to be going?"

Dissy shook her head because she was crying so she couldn't speak. She wanted to tell him she sometimes cried like that and it didn't mean anything. Dr. Peter told her she mustn't worry about it, it was just a release from nervous tension and it was perfectly normal.

"How's about letting me see your ticket?"

She held her breath for sometimes that helped her to stop crying. He was bending over her repeating his questions. He touched her shoulder, "Hey, you'll have to get out if you don't have no ticket."

Holding her breath made her dizzy and lightheaded. Maybe that was why she had the funny idea then that she did have a ticket after all, that she'd been absent minded and forgotten about it. Hopefully, therefore, she dumped everything out of her purse onto her lap.

The handkerchief, a safety pin, a nickel and a dime and a penny and the three photographs. That was all, there wasn't any ticket, of course. But she picked up the three photographs and held them out.

"There's a picture of Father and one of Maidie and one of all of us."

He merely glanced at the pictures and handed them back, "Only you don't have no ticket."

"No."

"And is 'at all the money you have?"

"Yes."

"Jeez, Miss, you can't go anywheres for sixteen cents."

"No."

"So what am I supposed to do?"

"I don't know." Her voice was barely audible.

"Where'd you get on?" (No answer.)

"Where dya think you're going?" (No answer.)

His voice began to rise with exasperation. "Now all of a sudden you're deaf and dumb. You can speak up and tell a guy where you're going anyway if you expect him to take ya there, can't ya? I get a fine if I carry unauthorised persons. Ya got me over a barrel, I can't put a young lady like you out in the middle of nowhere in the middle of the night. For the love Mike you can tell me where you're going to, can't ya!"

She pointed to the sign in the front of the bus. "I'm going there."

"So that's it. You're going to the end of the line. You're going the whole way for just exactly sixteen cents. Or maybe you'd rather I just took you for nothing. You got it figured out I'm just in business for my health or something. But I'll tell you what, it's like stealing, that's what it is, sneaking a ride, maybe you're not takin' anything but you're getting something for nothing that you didn't pay for, just like in stealing, see!"

"Oh." She scrambled to her feet.

"Where do you think you're going now?"

"I'm getting off then."

"Oh no you're not, lady. You just stay right where you are." He strode back to the driver's seat. When he got the engine started he turned around and looked at her sitting meekly in her place. "I don't care, old Davidson isn't putting no lady out in the middle of the night in the middle of nowhere, not never. Understand!"

As a matter of fact they were only a few miles out of Carnival-by-the-Sea, and it was perhaps fifteen minutes later when Davidson drew the bus up in front of an all-night stand on the edge of town.

"Look, Miss, you go in there. I gotta take the bus up to the terminal but I get a half-hour break so I'll come back and buy you a cuppa coffee or a sandwich, whatever you want. Only look, when I come back you gotta act like you never seen me before, that it's a pickup or something so folks won't figure it out about me letting you ride on the bus and all. Okay?"

Dissy stood beside him passively waiting for him to open the door. She only half understood him partly because she was so be-

mused by her own thoughts and partly because he spoke most indistinctly hardly raising his voice above a whisper, and he had assumed the tight lipped manner of the movie gangster.

"Now you wait here a couple seconds so's nobody'll put two and two together seeing the bus drive away and seeing you walk in. Then you go in and ask for the menu or something, or if you want you can order. I'll come back and pick up the check. Only remember act like you never seen me before. Okay?"

He pressed the lever that opened the door and Dissy stepped down.

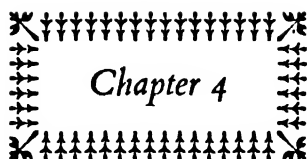
"Okay, I'll see ya."

He closed the door but opened it again immediately, "Say, what I said about stealing back there, I didn't mean it, you know. I got excited and things and I'm sorry, and it ain't stealing anyways. And so long again, I'll be looking for you, remember, see ya now, okay?"

Then he shut the door once more, slammed the bus into gear and with a couple of jolts swung it up the street.

Dissy stood stock still for quite a while, not because of the instructions and injunctions that had been showered so confusingly at her poor unlistening ears, but because she had forgotten temporarily why on earth she was there and she was wondering fuzzily whether Miss Coles wouldn't be coming soon and telling her to go to bed.

But it was chilly and damp in spite of the clearness of the night and suddenly she became aware of the fresh wet smell of the ocean and simultaneously she realised that she had come to Carnival-by-the-Sea, she had made the journey and she had come home.



Chapter 4

ED MILLER was squatting in the sand under a bulging bay window of the Oceanside throwing pebbles against the glass and calling out in a small voice, "Belinda Fine, Belinda Fine!"

God knows how long he'd been there poking around for pebbles, hours and hours, it must have been. The sand was cold and quite fine and felt good sifting between his fingers; he'd throw his head back like a dog baying the moon and call out the name, "Belinda Fine." Imagining, when she comes I shall be lifted up. Angelic Belinda Fine. He traced her initials in the sand. Write sorrow on the bosom of the earth. "Belinda Fine." There are a number of things to attend to, Mrs. Fine. You can understand that. First and foremost, how the hell does one get quit of this place? Short of putting a bullet through one's brain, that is. There, there, Mrs. Fine, don't you worry, I know it's hard on hotelkeepers for their patrons to take themselves off thuswise, gives the place a bad name and bloodies up the sheets. Ah my friends and oh my foes that's the place where Ed Miller turned up his toes.

Seriously, however, you see, I have had a bad shock. Shad bock. Words, words, words. "Belinda Fine, Belinda Fine!" Ping, a pebble against the glass.

"What?" she said and opened the window. The light she had just switched on blinded him, she saw him blinking. "What on earth are you doing down there?"

Trains, airplanes, busses, ships at sea. I suppose there are schedules, it is to be supposed further that some means of transportation is available even in such God-forsaken spots as Carnival-by-the-Sea though I cannot be any longer certain that the place is not a figment of my imagination. Belinda Fine leaning from the win-

dow was saying, "What on earth are you doing down there?"

"I'm very sorry."

"What?"

"To disturb you. This time of night. I lost my key."

"You're drunk as a loon."

"Yes," he answered soberly. "I imagine I'm drunk too."

One thing at a time, however. Drunk or sober I shall get myself into some conveyance and let myself be carried away, away, away. However, at this point it would be reasonable to suppose that *she* could be crushed like an insect. Aha, Mrs. Albany, I withhold my hand and I watch you crawling like a fly and by and by, wanton boy that I am I shall cease and desist withholding my hand. That is, if I don't get out of here quick.

"Belinda."

"What, honey chile?"

"How do I get out of here?"

"Oh come on in. The door isn't locked and you didn't lose your key because I never gave you one."

Key, key, key? How women do run on! Latent homosexuality. That was the key. That's the secret of it all. That's what Jeanne's favourite psychologist told the precious Freddy. If it's not blatant, it's latent, I always say. But to put first things first, and that's all I ask, how the hell does one put a million miles between thee and me, Mrs. Albany.

"Oh," he said vaguely to the woman in the window. He continued squatting in the sand and rooting for pebbles not because he needed them any more but because he had needed them before to attract Belinda Fine's attention. One of the laws of inertia is that one likes to continue any activity that one has once taken up.

She began to giggle, "You look very crazy down there."

"I am crazy also," he said reasonably. "Crazy and drunk both and I've just seen a ghost."

"I'm not surprised. The town's full of them," she said lightly. "I see them every day, sometimes two or three at once."

"Also, I've been reading a letter that . . . that I wrote to myself."

"That's very interesting."

"Ah Belinda Fine, I hear irony in your voice. Tsk tsk."

"Not at all. What did you say to yourself?"

"... that I was a leaf, a little dried up leaf, and I weep for my little sister."

"Doesn't sound very cheerful."

"No, it is not cheerful. But she is only my half sister."

"Oh."

"She is only half a sister and I am only half a man. I've thrown the better half away. I'm starving."

"I should think so, I'll bet you haven't had anything to eat since breakfast."

Belinda Fine trying to find the best way to his heart. An excellent thing in women, but the poor girl didn't realise that what she was looking for was a burned out crater. Jeanne found that out also to her sorrow. All the thoughts like whirling lances striking at his brain. Which is why, perhaps, that madmen babble. Just to keep up with the ideas a little bit. Thoughts. He was drunk. He was crazy. He had seen a ghost. He had the letter. He hadn't eaten since breakfast, as a matter of fact, like she said. Also he suffered from a post nasal drip, which he hadn't mentioned, which made his head stuffy, which was stuffed in any case with id, libido, ego, superego, sub-conscious, latent homosexuality, anal eroticism, etcetera, etcetera, all slithery and slimy and probably as blue as the guts of a chicken or the guts of anything though he wasn't an expert on entrails.

The ancients, however, used to tell fortunes by innards.

Let there be liver and lights.

"No, as a matter of fact, I haven't eaten. You're right, dead right as you go along, but he's just as dead as if he'd been wrong."

"What!"

"A poem I had to learn about Jonathan Gray who died defending his right of way. I had to learn it to get an automobile license in California."

"Well, it's too much for me."

"Yes, I have pondered and it's too much for me too."

"Well," she said briskly. "I'm having supper myself right now, why don't you join me."

"Supper! This time of night. You should be in bed and asleep long since."

"I reckon you lost your watch too. It's only eight o'clock."

"Eight o'clock!" he repeated incredulously. "I thought it was at least four in the morning." He was astounded. He was drunk. He was crazy. He had seen a ghost. He had the letter. He hadn't eaten since breakfast and all of a sudden out of the blue he was handed eight hours. Like an old telephone somebody gives you saying first, "Ed's right here and wants to talk to you." So you, Ed, have to pick up the phone and say, "Hello, hello, hello."

"Hello," he said, "eight o'clock, well whatdayaknow."

"I got interested in my book so I didn't get supper till late."

"Oh yes, the Manure Mind."

Not very funny, he was afraid, and she merely said, "The Mature Mind," primly. Not funny at all. Well, what could you expect? He began to feel terribly sad.

"If you keep squatting there much longer your knees are going to crack."

True enough. As she spoke he became aware of agonising aches in his knees and legs. Drunkenness, Insanity, Hallucinations, Hunger, Sadness, and Pain. Not to mention the Goddam eight hours extra. "Well, let's have a party."

"Party, party, party. Let's ask everyone we know and go to the Carnival and ride on the loop the loops and we'll dance at the casino by the light of the moon. Belinda Fine, Belinda Fine."

And the poor girl was saying for at least the fortieth time, "Why don't you come in like a sensible man and have something to eat?"

"Party, party, party. Please Belinda."

Know then, Belinda Fine, that for nigh on fifteen years Ed Miller likes a party, party, party, because he can always check his troubles at the door, door, door.

"Let's have a party Belinda, that lasts all night, we'll dance the whole night through, we can take time off to ride in the tunnel of love and eat taffy candy."

"You're nuts. The place is shut up tight this time of year."

"What?"

"I said the carnival is closed down."

"Belinda Fine, Belinda Fine," he was keening. Keens we doubt ever got keened. "You simply do not understand."

"But I could ask some friends over."

"You simply do not understand. Just like the Russians who wanted to throw the piano out of the window."

"They didn't because there was nobody who would have understood. Ivan said to Boris, 'Let's throw the grand piano out of the window.' And Boris said to Ivan, 'Ivan, we can't do that because nobody would understand.'"

Then all of a sudden he was inside the hotel sitting at the kitchen table with Belinda bustling around fixing him something to eat. He spied a bottle of whiskey in the cupboard under the sink, reached out and absently poured out a tumbler full as if it were milk. At the very same instant Belinda expertly removed bottle and glass.

"I didn't want it anyway," he said petulantly.

"No."

"All right ignore me."

"I'm not ignoring you. I'm scrambling you some eggs."

"Belinda, you're so very kind to me." It was fatal, he felt as though he were going to weep. Crying drunk, he thought with disgust. "You're too good to me." Real masochist, toying with the pain.

"Forget it, chum." She plunked the scrambled eggs down in front of him, filled a cup of coffee, unfolded his napkin and handed it to him, moved a plate of sandwiches closer to him. "How about some milk?"

"Yeah, I like milk."

"If I'd known you were coming, I'da baked a cake."

"Like in the song."

"Ya." She grinned and sat down.

He drank the milk, draining the glass before setting it down. "Thanks, Belinda." He was looking at her thinking she certainly wasn't pretty, or young and her figure was nothing to write home about, big pineapples sure enough but probably little wads of cotton, not to mention straps and wires, makes 'em what they ain't, nowadays, so pert and pokey. Well, never mind, tonight he'd sleep with her, sure 'nough.

She did have a wonderfully kind face. Thin and bony with pouches under the eyes and a funny blemish on the side of her chin, a kind of mole or birthmark, black brown on a wan, in spite of its sunburn, face. Perhaps it was the glaring kitchen light that was so unkind to her complexion, revealing the enlarged pores and the lines—crinkly crows' feet and furrows in her forehead, lines around her mouth; she was unhappy looking, anxious looking, everybody in the world suffers from anxiety, angst, anxiety and anguish, pity the poor sinners, embittered, vulnerable, she probably married a real stinker like me, and kind, nevertheless, so that he saw beauty there in the dull face.

So out of gratitude he started praising the food extravagantly and ate even the peanut butter and raisin bread sandwiches which he abhorred. She seemed to like the idea of having a party and was trying to think up a list of people she knew who she could get hold of at the last minute.

"Not a very exciting bunch, I'm afraid," she was saying. "There isn't such a thing in this Godforsaken town." He nodded his head half listening. He might find them amusing, though, she explained. A man names Eustace Widd and his wife Sandra who paints, Edward Nace, Rudy Parkinson and Phil Johnson.

"Party, party, party," he said woodenly.

"Phil Johnson might be away. He's a salesman."

"Then he couldn't come."

"No."

"Then there's Peter Moresby, but we've had a fight."

He tried to keep his mind on what she said, but he was beginning to feel panicky. "What's Peter Moresby to you, Belinda?" he said at random.

"Oh nothing, nothing at all, really."

Exchange me for a goat and I will turn the business of my soul to such exsufflicate and blown surmises, matching your inference. All of which was nothing in his young life, Belinda to Peter, Peter to Belinda, trying by main force to feel jealousy, to feel something.

Curiously twinned, he discovered his beloved Jeanne and Mrs. Jessica Albany floating up to the top of his mind. Christ, I hate women. Quite unaware, Belinda continued telling him about her friends. Tina Grosz is real pretty, she might be able to make it. There's Billie Kern who's a girl, and of course Phoebe Buttersworth, she didn't know whether she'd ask Phoebe. Phoebe would be strictly from hunger.

All pretty small pickings. And Belinda is thoroughly aware of that, and is ashamed of them. Which is just like a woman. They're ashamed of their clothes or their houses or their husbands or their friends, and never, never, never in the wide world no matter what they've done ever ashamed of themselves.

He himself was drowning in shame. He was about to go under for the third time into shame, indescribable, nasty, horrifying shame. Good God, if it wasn't the lovely, exquisite Jeanne he was imagining walking hand in hand with the fiendish older woman. He realised that Belinda wasn't really being deprecating about her friends, merely telling him about them. Which didn't make him feel any better.

You can't swim in shame any more than you can swim in quicksand. No doubt the bottom of hell was coated with it.

"It's a damn shame," he said, "I won't be able to make it."

"What?"

"The party."

"But I thought you wanted . . ."

"I gotta go." He stood up suddenly and started playing with

the string from the ceiling light. "I gotta get out of here quick. On the bus. Tonight."

She looked at him silently, perfectly blankly. Then after a minute she felt mad and disappointed and bewildered. "All right, then," she said impatiently.

"I'm sorry." He kept batting the little knot at the bottom of the string like a big cat, then he grabbed it and held it close to his eyes examining it minutely. He felt like an utter ass. He tried to mitigate it and explain. "I . . . I . . . I . . ." The more he tried, the worse it got. "You see . . ." not managing to explain anything at all, merely saying over and over, "You see . . . I gotta get out of this place . . ."

"I gotta get the hell outa here, understand! Don't worry I'll pay through the first like I promised, but you see . . . there's been a change in plans and . . . I have to leave . . . tonight."

"Well, *okay*," she said irritably.

"Can you tell me when the bus goes through?"

"No. I haven't the faintest idea." She had risen herself and was now clearing the table taking out her anger on the knives and forks, banging them into the sink.

"Well how can I find out?" She just shrugged her shoulders without answering, her back was toward's him, the most non-committal and noncommunicative back in the world. An angry back.

"My God!" he exclaimed and put his hands on her shoulders. "Belinda Fine, I need help. Can't you see that? I'm drowning. I swear to God, it's like drowning . . ."

She had turned around instantly and stared up at him. Now he had backed away from her till he was standing against the wall, his head was lowered and he shook it like a madman. His speech suddenly blurred as he continued, ". . . in shame and nastiness. That woman . . . she called herself my mother . . . she wasn't, she wasn't, you hear!"

Then he was walking out of the room and sitting himself heav-

ily down in the chair next to the telephone. He took the directory on his knees and was leafing desperately through it.

Busses . . . he was having trouble with the Goddam alphabet. Awnings and Canopies, Babbitting, Beer distributors, Camps, All Angels Farming, Inc. Bus Lines, Bus Rental, there it is Bus Ticket Offices, Bob's Luncheonette, United Bus Lines, Info., and he was telephoning, getting the wrong number, looking it up again and then of course, there was no answer.

Suddenly Belinda was standing behind him. "What's the matter, Ed?"

"Nobody answers the Goddam phone."

"Who are you calling?"

"Bob's Luncheonette for Bus info."

"It'd be closed this time of night."

How reasonable a woman can be, how matter-of-fact, how accepting, how forgiving also. Now she wanted to be helpful. "Take it easy," she was saying gently. "It can wait till morning can't it?" She sat down on the floor, "How about telling me about it."

Tempted to, Goddam, all day he had wanted to talk about it and who could be a finer listener than Belinda. One of those women who not only instantly recognise unhappiness when they see it, but batten on it, eat it up, other people's unhappiness, of course, they want to know all about it, get a bang out of every last gruesome, morbid, sordid, agonising detail, lap it up sitting with their heads on one side and their hands so neatly folded, like a cat lapping up cream.

"The past is a bucket of ashes."

"Unh-huh," she said interestedly.

"End quote."

"Is that quoting from somebody?"

"Yes."

"It isn't really true, though."

"No. Unfortunately."

She was trying to be so understanding, poor girl, but the mo-

ment had passed. She was no longer one of these strangers we can unload our griefs upon, latter day priests,—bartenders, casual women, people who sit beside us in trains. He had become aware of her particularly again, the way she tipped her face back to look at him, her eyes that did not turn on him steadily but poked and probed over his face, her wide lips drawing themselves back from her teeth in an understanding smile. Uncharitably he noticed once again that her hair was greasy and hung in careless strands. He leaned forward and patted her hand, as he did so the letter in his pocket rustled, he winced.

"Nope, I don't want to talk about it."

"Sometimes talking helps, but a lot of the time it just makes it worse."

"Belinda, you're a wise woman."

"No, not wise. Just old." Sweet Jesus, she'd be telling him *her* troubles if he didn't watch out. Than which nothing in the world could be more dull.

"What would you do, Belinda, if I told you I was a murderer."

"I'd ask you if you didn't want some more coffee."

"Seriously, what would you do?"

"Seriously, there's plenty more out there on the stove. Wouldn't you like some?"

"Of course I'm not, though. It'd be a public service if I were, but unfortunately I'm too much of a coward."

"For the third and last time will you have some more coffee?"

"No, no thanks."

A drink, now, that would be different.

"Belinda, this is a rum hotel you rina, no bar, no guests, no nothing."

"This is the off season, remember."

"Why don't you close it and go off on a vacation."

"I meet such interesting people this way."

"Supposin' Belinda, you call up your friends and we'll have a party after all." He felt infinitely weary. He remembered he had a pint up in his room. "I'll go change my clothes even."

He looked down at the white salt on his sleeve and the stiff wrinkled drying of his pants and shirt. Sea Shells. He held the shell to his ear and it said, "David Albany, David Albany." Then the ocean had rolled in on him.

"Fine clothes make the man," he said hollowly. "That is, handsome does as handsome is, things are always what they seem, all that glisters is gold, my golden girl."

She took to the idea of a party with enthusiasm. "That's swell, Ed. I'm so glad you've changed your mind. I'll start phoning people right away. Like I said, I don't know who I can scare up, but who cares. It'll be sorta crazy and sorta fun." She got to her feet and patted his knee, "And it'll take our minds off our troubles, won't it."

Bathing, shaving, changing into clean clothes, if you concentrate wholeheartedly on such things it can take your mind off your troubles. Jeanne used to wash her hair and give herself a manicure when she got feeling blue. Kills two birds with one stone, it makes you beautiful and it cheers you up. He was looking for a decent shirt to wear. It was highly questionable whether he would ever be beautiful or cheerful. Let's face it.

So far the only shirt he could find that hadn't already been worn for a week was his unfavourite one, a sports jobby with tremendous poinsettias blockprinted all over it in black and red. How strong, how masculine, how virile and who knows possibly Belinda will fancy it.

He thought hard about all the people who must have liked it. The designer who looked up from his drawing board with stars in his eyes. "Eureka, I have found it!" No doubt these poor worms enjoy their meagre inspirations just as much as Sandro Botticelli himself. "Just the thing to wrap our Daddy Buntings in" Big Loud Red Poinsettias printed on a black ground. And the buyers clapping their hands with glee, no fairy would be without one from Miami to Seattle to the shores of Tripoli. And the store heads

and the salesmen and the sadistic wives and sweethearts who spot them in ads and shop windows and at last the sad ultimate consumer, if that's the word for it, the user, the wearer who can only grit his teeth and avoid looking at himself in the mirror.

So he fell to looking at himself in the glass, full face and three-quarter face, juttied out his jaw and appreciated the effect, but noticed again a little blister on his lip that he had had for four days and wondered whether or not it might be cancer.

All of which is a way to pass the time. From below he could hear Belinda telephoning, "Hello, Bobby." Her voice waved around like a hound dog's tail. "Howar you? Long time no see . . ." and on and on.

Whereas the entire time, shocked and appalled his mind dwelt upon that living embodiment of catastrophe and doom, Norn, Moira, Eumenide, who dwelt, oh my God, and now he began to laugh mirthlessly and helplessly, Atropos, never to be avoided, residing in a coffee pot among the dunes.

Laughing till tears came to his eyes, laughter that was close to tears. Remembering he wanted a drink and rustling out a pint bottle of Old Crow, he fixed himself one in the cloudy toothbrush glass from the bathroom.

Because up to a certain point alcohol is very good medicine against what ails us. Because we must flee from what we can't do anything about. The escape mechanism, my children, is our salvation. The whiskey was very sharp and smelled slightly of peppermint toothpaste. Never mind, he drank it thirstily, the more like medicine, that peppermint flavour.

However, Jeanne had said, you can't really escape from things that are inside your own head. He couldn't precisely remember whether she had actually said it or whether it was one of those things he had assigned to her to say.

Jeanne, of course, occupied his thoughts in a rather peculiar way and lately the voice of conscience spoke in Jeanne's accents. However, can one's conscience accept the amorous suit of a professional banker and sportsman. That is the question. And so the

Belindas of this world are given us, kindly, warmhearted mother substitutes to us son surrogates to soothe and comfort.

Of comfort no man speak. My particular universe houses gods and devils merely, and what is a mortal man to do? Mrs. Albar hath wrought splendidly.

Here I sit in a strange hotel room, my life in ruins, preparing to have a party with a bunch of Belinda's bores, drinking low whiskey out of a toothbrush glass, wallowing in self-pity, and to tell the truth loving every minute of it.

When he had undressed the fat letter had fallen out of his pocket. He had placed it, face downwards, on the table beside his bed and from time to time he glanced at it.

He covered his face with his hands. There but for the grace of God go I. His little sister. He wanted to do something for her, he was indeed a wretch to be pitied if he did nothing for her. He stood up and went to the window, then he returned and stared at the envelope once more. He felt sober for the first time in years. Then he turned the envelope over and glanced at the superscription, resolution died, and weakness and indecision and fear returned.

Chapter 5

THE preparations weren't of any use. They helped to pass the time but they were of no real use. It is a strange thing to say, "help to pass the time" when there is so little time. There is really only a little time, each moment, each minute should be spent wisely, not "passed" merely. But one could not bear to be idle in that time, one had to use it making preparations even though the preparing was useless. That's because one is used to making preparations and plans. It's a habit of years and years. One has been making plans always through a whole lifetime and so it's impossible to stop and change. But it's all finished and ended now.

Jessica Albany sits here and waits. Bundled up in shawls and blankets, her hands folded, waiting sleeplessly in the wheelchair. It is impossible to tell whether it's still night or whether the day has come because all the blinds have been drawn and heavy curtains have been put over the windows so that not one scrap of light could get through; that way it would look from outside as if no one were there, because she had also wanted it to be very bright inside, she couldn't bear to have any part of the room in shadow.

It meant finding bulbs for lamps that hadn't been lighted for years. But she had the bulbs put away in a trunk upstairs, from every house she'd ever lived in, and all the lamps were brought out. Working very ingeniously with extension cords and multiple sockets it had been possible to attach them to the ceiling outlets.

Also the furniture had been pushed back making a free space around her, about fifteen feet in diameter in front of the door; her wheelchair was in the exact centre in a blaze of light and the three dogs lay at her feet. On either side of the door were placed two four-foot-high brass urns, fantastic objects crusted with nymphs

and shepherds and cupids and flocks of lambs; each supported a cluster of light bulbs shaded in red damask; more light came from a nosey bridge lamp over her shoulder; a beautiful Chinese vase that had been wired for electricity stood on the chest of drawers at her right; two gooseneck student lights were on the floor behind her; other lamps were scattered over the rest of the bedroom.

In a way, even she herself could see how useless all these preparations were. Ridiculous as well as useless. Well, it doesn't matter. It doesn't really matter. Jessica Strait Albany long ago lived out all her happiness. All the happiness was over quite long ago and what else does one prepare for except for happiness. Preparing for trouble is really preparing to get around the trouble and surmount it. One can get through trouble if one can see beyond to a time when the trouble is stopped and gone. But that's ended now of course.

Everybody worked very hard on the preparations. Mrs. Tandy had come bringing Edna and John Everett with her; Jackie O'Pug, the older one, that is, had sneaked along too, and he turned out to be very helpful untwisting all the extension cords. At least now, no one can say we aren't prepared. We are prepared as much as it's possible to be. Yet it is very little, really, there was hardly anything one could do in a larger sense, that is. Plans and preparations are for the future and now although one waits, there's nothing to look forward to.

In a way it's like falling off a precipice, one doesn't look forward to the end. They say one's whole life flashes in front of the eyes at the past, one lives it over again in an instant. Now she is only thinking about the past but it is a strange past all mixed up and happening at once and it is not an instant, it is hours and hours she rocks back and forth and rays of transparent shadows cast by opposite lights play on the floor around her.

When one is old there is so little to hope about, in any case. There, it doesn't matter. It really doesn't matter. She begins to laugh silently and shake her fists. You see, it doesn't matter to me.

When one is old one has such silly, stupid hopes. They aren't hopes any more, they are little expectations merely. One can wish that tomorrow it will be pleasant out and that perhaps one can sit in the sun for a little while and dream about the things that happened so long ago; in one's dreams they seem to come back a little, the good things that happened, one can dream about them and say, oh I remember just how it was, if it is a sunny day and one sits there dreaming.

Or perhaps there is something good for supper. One has forgotten how good things are to taste. In a way it's lucky how lazy one's tongue is about remembering how good a taste is. Every day something can taste better than it ever did before. So one can look forward to dinner. There are so few other pleasures when one is old and crippled and sick.

Ha, do you call those hopes! There are people who can think of their children and of their children's children. One can take one's place quietly in the generations; it is for every one to pass and sit in the corner while the young ones come and have their happiness and we join in the happiness of our children and our children's children.

Jessica Albany isn't sitting in the sun now and the taste in her mouth is the taste of fear. The children of Jessica Albany, call them that, yes call them all her children and the mockery is plain. So there can be no happiness, only bitterness. There isn't anything except the bitterness. One has become used to it and resigned to it, one does not hope any longer, in fact it is hard to recall that one ever had any hope. It seems as if the bitterness had been there in the beginning, the bitterness and the hopelessness.

There is nothing then to hope for and there is nothing to be in fear of losing. One ought to be very brave since there is nothing to lose. It should be easy to be as brave as a lion. It is silly even to lock the door when there is nothing inside. It is very strange though, one locks the door and one is afraid.

In spite of everything one trembles with fear. It's like shivering with cold, and the feeling of cold is there, so one wraps up and

bundles up. One sits here all bundled up in blankets and shawls, shivering with cold. For hours and hours one has sat here shivering like this, trembling. The light shows red through the shades on the brass lamps; it is a burning colour but one's eyes cannot take in that warmth. It is colder than it has ever been before, one keeps shivering. Trembling with fear, rather, with the doors all locked. And the lights all burning so that one can see all around, no one will be able to sneak up in the dark.

Then it is hot. The cold passes and one is burning hot; one throws the blankets back. It is so hot, one cannot work fast enough to get rid of the blankets and shawls, they are suffocating, and it's hard because one's hands are awkward and clumsy, they tremble so.

She aches all over and is stiff, that is part of being so frightened and afraid. At one moment she is thirsty, it seems as if she were dying of thirst. There is a carafe of water and a glass on the low stool beside her, but when she fills the glass and lifts it to her lips she cannot bring herself to drink the water. She cannot even wash away the nauseating taste of fear that is in her mouth. She leans forward and locks her teeth together trying to get over the nausea, waiting for it to pass. That is the worst, that and the thought. One tries not to think, if only the mind would stop thinking for a minute, if there were a minute when the mind was just perfectly blank and the stomach wasn't acting up.

Mrs. Tandy has gone to sleep. It seems amazing that any one could possibly sleep here now, but she lay down on the bed that was set up for her in the corner and was sound asleep and snoring in two minutes. Even though the light was shining in her face, she couldn't keep her eyes open. She said, "Now Missus, you call me if anything happens. If anything happens at all. I'm right here and you remember to call me." Then she went to sleep before her head had hardly touched the pillow.

Mrs. Tandy doesn't have any feelings at all.

Every so often Mrs. Tandy stirs in her sleep and says, "Is there anything you want, Missus? Is there anything I can get you?" But

she hardly wakes up, she asks the questions but she is fast asleep again before one can answer.

All evening long Mrs. Tandy had tried her best to get her mistress to go to bed. She said, "Missus, we'll do everything, you lie down and take things easy."

Edna and John Everett were a great help in making all the preparations although it was obvious they didn't think there was any use in what they were doing. Except, of course, they saw that it was important for Mrs. Tandy to have a place to sleep. They would have spent the whole evening just making up a bed for Mrs. Tandy, only Mrs. Albany kept after them. As it was, they kept going off to a corner to talk and talk. Mrs. Albany saw that well enough even when she was busy herself looking through the drawers of the chiffonier. They were like irresponsible children and Mrs. Albany had to be after them every minute to see that they did things right. It was ridiculous of Mrs. Tandy to think she could lie down.

"No, no, Mrs. Tandy, I can't possibly lie down."

She racked her brains trying to remember where there might be some more lamps. Besides when she wasn't busy the fear came back.

"No, Mrs. Tandy, I tell you I don't want to lie down."

Edna and John Everett kept looking at her in amazement. Then they'd puff out their cheeks and shake their heads as if they thought she was crazy. She was upset, everybody knew that, she'd be the first to admit it herself. That was why she wouldn't let them in when they first came and knocked on the door. Besides, in the dark, how was she to know who they were.

John Everett had come up on the porch, he knocked on the door and then he came over to the window and knocked there, "Here we are," he said. "Open up."

"Go away, go away from here!" she shrieked. The dogs barked and growled, Pinkie was whining and trembling with excitement and up above in his cage Mr. Poco was flapping his wings and

calling out Polly, Polly, Polly. "Go away from here," the weak voice came through the closed glass.

"Well, Ma, what the hell am I supposed to do?" John Everett bawled from the edge of the porch to the great, huge Mrs. Tandy below.

"You go on up there, Edna, maybe you can make her see that it's us."

But the girl's freckled face and lank, dark hair were just as strange as the man's. "Go away. Go away," was the bitter, obdurate cry over the bedlam of dogs and parrot. It's a trick, it's a trick, that David's got a woman there to make me open the door. Those faces illy seen in the shadows were the faces of all the enemies she had ever known. Stephen is dead, she said spitefully, all you fancy women don't have to come here looking for him. I am his wife, you hear, I don't have to put up with all these terrible women "Go away from here!"

"Please, Mrs. Albany, it's me Edna Tandy and this is John Everett, we've come with Mother. Give me the key through the window so we can come in."

"Go away, I tell you!"

Polly, Polly, Polly. And the dogs never ceased from barking.

Finally they were going away. She had driven them away, they were creaking across the porch and down the long, steep flight of wooden steps. "Go away, go away. I'll call the police!"

Below on the sand the three were talking. "I'm telling you, we shoulda called the state troopers, Ma."

"Could you tell, had she heard on the radio about Miss Dissy?"

"The old lady's crazy as a coot herself, Ma. You can't tell what she's heard. John, did you see her face?"

"All the murderin' she's talking about is right in her head, if you ask me."

"Lordy me, what's the good Lord think He's doing sending a poor old lady so many troubles at once. Well, I guess old Annie Tandy's got to get herself up on that porch." She sighed thinking of the nimble way of Jackie or Pug running up those steps, but

they're a sight harder to manoeuvre when you're big and fat and old.

And then, it seemed just because she was thinking about them, Jackie and Pug, that Jackie or Pug, himself, came sidling out from behind the side of the building. He'd sneaked after them to see the murder thing. Edna and Mrs. Tandy bawled him out good, but Mrs. Tandy was real glad he was there because for sure he'd be able to get the key out of the Missus like he did every day of his life, that is him or Jackie. The Missus'd know him, looking out and seeing the kid she wouldn't be scared and panicky.

Jackie or Pug scrambled up the steps while his father scowled and his mother kept working her jaws as how he should be home and in bed, and probably that was where they all should be and not out on a wild goose chase over a crazy old woman.

"And it beats me," says John Everett, "why she don't have some of her own looking after her."

"Yes," Edna put in spitefully, "why doesn't she have that loony daughter of hers that just escaped from the nut house staying with her."

"Hush all of you." Mrs. Tandy was watching the little boy crouching by the window tapping in a special way and with extra flourishes because he knew he was indispensible. He tapped and waited and hissed, "It's me, Missus."

The curtain was drawn back and through a crack in it he saw into the room he had never seen by night and the woman's twisted face he could barely recognise, black hollows for eyes, her cheeks drawn in, the skin blanched and blotched, the mouth opening and closing inaudibly; but Shep had jumped up with her paws on the sill and wagged her tail in recognition and a bony hand came up and pushed the key under the window.

Mrs. Albany immediately set them all to work clearing the space in front of the door and attaching the lamps. Apparently the idea had come to her after she had called Mrs. Tandy and while she had been waiting she had lighted all the lights that were readily available.

Mrs. Tandy never could discover precisely what had happened. She had vaguely heard of David Albany as the Missus' stepson, who, together with the shyster lawyers who had got hold of Dissy, was holding up the inheritance. She had also heard about a strange young man who was staying at Belinda Fine's and hanging around the bars in town all day. They talked about him because it was queer to see "city folks" there that time of year. He didn't sound much like the man that the Missus said she had seen.

Mrs. Tandy's other concern was to find out as delicately as she could whether her mistress had heard the news broadcasts about Dissy's escape.

"Missus, did you listen to the radio, tonight?"

"No, Annie, why? Why should I listen to the radio? What's on the radio?"

"Not nothing special, Missus. They were playing some pretty music, before, I was thinking it was too bad if you didn't hear it."

"I wouldn't have time to listen. I wouldn't think of listening."

All the while John Everett kept saying, "Well, it beats me. Well, it beats me!" He was a rather short man in his late forties, very husky and strong. His face was red and jolly in its expression, even now when things were so serious he couldn't keep from smiling; not so much at Mrs. Albany, but at his wife and at Mrs. Tandy. He'd smile and say in a deep voice, "Well, it beats me." He wore his hat in the house, but after a while Mrs. Tandy noticed it and made him take it off. He didn't want to and he argued with her, but then he said, "Well, it beats me," and put it on a statue of Psyche.

Mrs. Tandy slyly disconnected the radio, in order to attach a lamp, she said. What she said to John Everett was, "It don't hurt her, what she doesn't know."

"Well, it beats me."

Mrs. Albany kept saying, "Will you hurry. Please hurry a little!"

She hardly knew what she was saying.

"Oh, oh, Mrs. Tandy, there is some one on the porch. I can hear somebody walking around on the porch."

"Missus, it's just the wind racketing around."

"There's somebody opening the back door. You forgot to lock the back door. I can feel a draught from a door being opened."

"It's the wind in the chimney, Missus. Here I'll move your chair for you."

"Mrs. Tandy, Mrs. Tandy, there's somebody out there with a flashlight. I can see him sneaking around in the yard with a flashlight."

"It's just a car going by on the road. I saw it myself just a minute ago, Missus. The headlights shining from the road."

John Everett and Edna were huffing and puffing moving the furniture, clearing out a round space in front of the door. "I want it so I can see if there's anybody coming in the door."

"Well, it beats me!" said John Everett and he scratched the back of his neck.

"Be careful, oh do be careful when you move that Japanese stand. It's leg was broken when it was shipped here. The railroad company paid to have it mended but it's still weak. Be awfully careful how you move it."

"Yes, Ma'am, I'm being careful."

"Do hurry. Please hurry a little."

John Everett said to his wife, "Well, it beats me why she doesn't call the state troopers. If there's all this danger about her going to be murdered, she had ought to call the state troopers."

Edna just shook her head.

The dogs were barking and carrying on the whole time. They had to be tied up in the corner because they kept following John Everett around and snapping at his heels.

John Everett shouted to Mrs. Tandy, "Mother, whyn't we call the state troopers instead of moving all this furniture around?"

"You just do what the Missus says, John Everett."

Edna hissed in his ear, "There's a world of difference between

a crazy old woman like that thinking she's going to be murdered and having it happen."

"Yes," said Mrs. Tandy, "I'm not worrying about anything I can't take care of myself."

"And supposin'," said Edna, "one of those crazy dogs of hers ups and bites the state troopers when they get here. If we called them, that'd happen sure as day."

"Well, it beats me."

Pug put in his two cents worth, "Jeez, let's call the police."

"Hush now, you Jackie, I mean Pug."

"Oh dear, oh dear, there's so much to be done. I wish you wouldn't all stand around talking so. Put the light up there on top of the secretary! No, no, don't stand on that chair, get the step ladder."

"Jackie, Pug, I mean, you run upstairs and get some more light bulbs out of that trunk where I showed you."

"I don't want to call the police. I will not have you call the police. It's a disgrace and a scandal. I won't have it, you hear!"

"No, Missus, we won't call nobody."

"I won't have it, I won't have it."

"There, Missus. Why don't you lie down in your bed and take things easy."

"No, Mrs. Tandy, I can't possibly lie down."

Three times during the evening the telephone rang. Each time it rang and rang, but Mrs. Albany refused to permit anyone to lift the receiver.

"Maybe it's important, Missus."

"No, it's that David. He's just calling up to call me foul names and vilify me. I know him. I know him, he'd do a cowardly thing like that. He knows that I'm crippled and I'm old and he thinks I have no friends. He would call me up and threaten me on the telephone."

Mrs. Tandy sighed, "I don't think it's him, Missus."

"It's he, it's he, I know it." Mrs. Albany sat next to the telephone her hand pressing down the receiver, she stared balefully

at their faces. She did not move until long after it had ceased ringing.

Then she was wheeling herself over to the chiffonier and yanking open the drawers. She spilled the contents out on the floor looking for something. The others had gathered around setting up the bed for Mrs. Tandy to sleep on. "But Ma," John Everett was saying, "it beats me how that old lady wouldn't answer the telephone."

Edna giggled, "I'll bet it was that daughter of hers who escaped outta the nut house."

"That's one conversation I'd like to hear. You couldn't tell which one was the crazy one."

"John Everett!" Mrs. Tandy frowned disapprovingly.

"But Ma, supposin' later we want to phone you. She'd never let you answer it."

"Things'll be a sight different in the morning, wait and you'll see."

Edna's face changed and tightened, "Mebbe so," she said non-committally. Mrs. Alban, 'ad returned on whirring wheels. She pulled at John Everett's jacket, "Here you, here you!"

"What's that, Ma'am?"

She handed him a little pearl handled pistol and a box of cartridges. "Here, load it and take it outside and see if it shoots."

He lifted it up to the light and opened it, then he handed it back. "I wouldn't shoot that thing, Ma'am."

"Why not?"

"It must be fifty years old, and the cartridges too. Like as not it'd explode in a person's face."

"Are you afraid then?"

"Yes, Ma'am, I'd be afraid."

She opened it herself and slipped the cartridges in. Then she wheeled herself to the door and shot twice toward the empty dunes. "There," she said, "it shoots all right."

"Jesus Christ, well, it beats me!"

Edna drew Mrs. Tandy aside, "Supposin' that crazy girl shows up here, she'll get killed for sure."

"I'll take that thing away from her pretty soon. Don't worry."

"When are you going to tell her anyway?"

"Tomorrow, I guess."

The bed that had been set up for Mrs. Tandy was one of the brass cots that used to be in a maid's room. It was rather hard with a thin, cotton mattress. Mrs. Albany looking at it, thought, we could have given her one of the better beds. There are plenty of good beds in here. But she kept silent because, after all, it seemed strange to have a servant sleeping on a white horsehair mattress.

She felt relieved, however, when Mrs. Tandy said cheerfully, "Why that's a fine bed, now. I'll sleep like a rock on it."

"And there's blankets in the wicker basket. I don't know they might just be the cotton ones, but I've forgotten where the others were put."

"That's all right, Missus. I'll get along fine."

John Everett and Edna and Jackie, Pug, rather, finally left. John Everett mumbling. "She shouldn't be having that roscoe. Someone is sure and get murdered and not just in nobody's head."

"Look, Ma, you sure you're gonna be all right?"

"I'll be fine as a daisy. Look, in the morning you go by at the Oceanside and see if the fellow there is the same one as the one she's talking about."

"Yeah, Ma, we'll do that."

"And if it is, explain how things are, you know."

"Yeah, Ma. Anything else?"

"No, not now."

"I'm worried about you bein' all right."

"I'll be all right."

Mrs. Tandy closed the door after them and bolted it, only to be greeted with, "Did you make sure and lock the door?"

"Yes, Missus."

She tried in earnest now to get Mrs. Albany to go to bed. She

said, "Are you real sure, Missus, you don't want to get in bed? You had ought to get some sleep, Missus."

"Don't you want to lie down in your bed, Missus? You can get some rest just laying down even if you don't go to sleep."

"No, I tell you, no."

"Things'll look a sight different in the morning iffen you get some rest, Missus." Mrs. Tandy frowned and puckered her mouth. She made little clucking sounds with her tongue. She went and looked out the window, drawing back the curtains so she could see.

"It's a real bright moonlight night out, Missus. It's bright like it's daytime and you can see for miles around."

Mrs. Albany was plucking at her shawl again trying to pull it up over her shoulders. Mrs. Tandy wrapped it gently around her. "There isn't nobody around for miles and miles, Missus."

After a while she added, "If anybody was to come, Missus, the dogs would make a racket. Remember all the noise they made when we came. You couldn't hear yourself think, they made such a noise. You know yourse', Missus, how they bark and carry on if a person just walks by on the road."

One's heart beats so and it is hard to breathe. Mrs. Tandy's talking seems to come from a great distance away. It's as though she were standing on the other side of a great river and her words hardly carry over the sound of the water. The pounding is inside one's own head. One closes one's eyes instinctively as if that might shut it out.

Mrs. Tandy watched her mistress closely, "Look Missus, supposin' you let me keep the pistol. It might go off or something and you'd get hurt."

"No, Annie, I shall keep it myself."

"Or it might hurt one of the dogs, Missus, or Mr. Poco."

"I shall keep it myself, Annie."

"Please, Missus."

The pounding in her head was unbearable and she couldn't breathe.

"No, Annie, no! No! No!" she screamed. "Do you hear, no!"

"Yes, Missus." Mrs. Tandy gave in. Abruptly she changed the subject, "Well, Missus, I'm going to lie down for a minute myself, if there's nothing else you want, if there isn't anything you want me to get you."

She sighed and loosened her clothes. "I'm staying dressed, Missus, so's I can come right away if you call." Unbuttoning a button here, undoing a hook and eye there, unzipping the placket in the side of her dress, unbuckling her belt, sighing and grunting, leaned down and removed her shoes; she was so weary she could hardly keep her eyes open and the room with all its furniture—imagine sleeping in that room with all that furniture, it makes you tired just thinking of dusting it all—whirling around in her head, and the Missus sitting there so straight and stiff in her chair, never winking her eye once, poor Missus, but by and by she'll doze off and I can get the pistol then, no need to upset her about it, poor thing, "Now Missus, you call me if anything happens at all." So sleepy she hardly knows if she's saying it out loud or just dreaming it, "I'm right here and you remember and call me." Oh the pillow feels good, oh there's nothing so good in the world as laying down in a bed when you need rest. I could sleep with all the lights in the world shining right in my face. Poor Missus.

Mrs. Tandy was lying there fast asleep. The deep, heavy breaths came in and out of her slow and regular, not snores, exactly, but great, peaceful, windy noises, inhaled, expelled, in out, in out, the air quaffed, embraced by the sleeping lungs, gently expelled, in out.

The whole room was a veritable cave of such winds, for the dogs slept. They who had been so restless and nervous throughout the evening, in this silence stretched out on the floor, and their quick light breathing demarked another rhythm.

Only herself awake and listening and stopping her breathing so she could wait and harken; there is the pounding in her ears, the alarmed blood leaping up in the veins, sparks of black dancing before her unblinking eyes. Then the voice rushes out of her, strange

and uncontrolled, that voice hardly her own, not her own except for the harsh tearing in her throat, straining through the vocal cords to the tautly parted lips, queer, denatured sound bursting out on the quiet air, "Mrs. Tandy, Mrs. Tandy."

"Yes, Missus, here I am, Missus!" She rears up out of sleep and in an instant is at her mistress' side. It is amazing that Mrs. Tandy can move so fast and surely, eyes hardly open when her feet are on the floor and carrying her across the room through an intricate barricade of chairs and tables and bureaus and chests of drawers, to tower monumental and strong in the central place before the door. "Here I am, Missus, I heard you calling out and I'm right here and what can I do for you? There, there, Annie Tandy is up and ready faster than you can blink your eye."

The great hands are pulling the blankets and the shawls closer. The kindly voice is begging her to come to bed, to get some sleep. "Just lay down and rest a little. I'll set by you, if you want. I'll set on the chair right by your bed, Missus."

"No, no, Mrs. Tandy. I'm sorry Mrs. Tandy. I thought I heard a sound, I thought I heard something."

Mrs. Tandy is touring around the room, dodging light wires, bulldozing her way through clots of displaced furniture, grabs a lamp that begins to topple, steadies it; she tries both doors, peaks out the windows. "There isn't a thing stirring, the whole world's gone to sleep, Missus."

And Mrs. Albany was saying frantically, "I heard something, it must have been something. But we're prepared. Annie, we're prepared for it." She waved the pearl handled pistol in the air.

"Put it up, Missus. Put it away."

"And I'd shoot too, Annie, I'd shoot it."

"Missus, you listen to me. You put that thing away. Put it up, I say." Mrs. Tandy had turned from the window, she bore down on her mistress, wary and massive and inexorable. Her eyes were almost closed in a face that was grey and blank with exhaustion. "You put it up, Missus!"

“Why . . . why!”

For a long minute the two faced each other, motionless in the weird multiplicity of lights and shadows, the one hunched in the shining steel chair, muffled in blankets and shawls, shapeless except for the emerging face marked with the pitiless cross and criss-crossing of lines, the great eyes glittering and tormented, the sharp chin lifted up and sputtering “whys” issuing between the parched, tense lips, astonished and furious, but the mind had already travelled beyond this to numbness and acquiescence; she bowed her head at last and the bony hand dropped the pistol into the great pocket in the arm of her chair.

Then she began to cry, great open-mouthed bawling as a child does, and tears which she sought neither to check nor cover streamed down her cheeks and dripped from her chin in bright gobbets on the woollen shawls.

“There, Missus, there!” Mrs. Tandy was patting her shoulder awkwardly and the dogs rushed up to comfort her, Pinkie first leaping up; Shep and Spot nudging their way in, wriggling, whimpering eagerly, thrusting their noses under her lax, withered hands.

Not to be comforted, oh, oh, oh, cries that were neither mourning nor moaning, but the immediate riven hurt bursting out in this tumultuous sorrowing. Oh, oh, oaahh bellowings, mewlings from an adult throat, strange and weird, that at last when quieted, such violence must pass, perish in the exhaustions that bear it, but still not comforted, calmed merely, she recalled one by one her griefs—it is the nature of each anguish to mark the anniversary of every bitterness and hurt that has come before—she recollected them and mourned.

Mrs. Tandy still stood at her side, patting her shoulder, murmuring, condoling, “There, there, Missus, don’t take on so, Missus,” and the dogs nuzzled at her hands.

The sorrow thus renewed found expression not in freshets of tears but in great floods of words. Little words at first, disjointed, mumbled. Mrs. Tandy leaning forward caught the syllables,

"Stephen . . . more than David . . . old, helpless . . . he, I tried . . . really . . . but lying is . . ."

"What is it, Missus? What are you trying to say?"

"Look . . . the dogs, what will become of them? . . . I . . ."

"Oh, Missus—"

"It's not for myself . . . really . . . I have been thinking . . ."

"Poor Missus, you—"

"Yes . . . yes . . . well . . ." She closed her eyes and rested her head against the back of the chair, for a moment she was silent, then she began again, words, matter of fact words, words, dry and dessicated as the lips that spoke them. Fantastic that moments ago she wept, this withered crone. One might as soon think of the bleached tree trunk in the wood giving up sap. Arid voice, arid words, rendered peculiarly convincing thus, as the sober small print in a document attests its truth by its grey aspect.

"You see, I believe that lying is worse. Yes, it is much worse. Than murder even. In a sense one suffers and dies in either case, but the murderer is kinder because he takes away one's life and memories altogether. It is cowardly to murder a poor old woman, but it is ten times more cowardly to lie. The deception takes away one's life but leaves the memories."

In pure astonishment, Mrs. Tandy backed away, stood leaning against a low chest of drawers. "Missus, it—"

Mrs. Albany raised her voice slightly to silence the other, then she spoke on coolly and impersonally, "It was the lies and lying, you see. One who is capable of that is capable of anything. It was my misfortune, it was my very great misfortune . . ." Slowly she brought her hands together and intermeshed the long bony fingers, then she let the big fist fall loosely into her lap.

"One's whole life, everything turns out to be lies. You can't take it in, at first, you never even imagined the possibility of your life being either true or false, you think life just *is*, the way a table *is* or a chair *is*, or a tree or a stone or a house *is*! And then suddenly it *isn't*. One's whole life turns out not to have been at all, it's only a picture that you had in your mind's eye and it was a false, an

untrue picture of something that never even existed. It's as though you were to go into a room and everything you touched turned into dust, puff, it isn't there, it's ashes. It's like a nightmare, only you awaken from a nightmare. I seemed to be waking up from a beautiful dream into a nightmare. Only the nightmare is real, the other was false. I thought I couldn't bear it, I . . ."

She broke off and began to rock herself back and forth in the chair, frowning and winking her eyes, her mouth drooped sadly at the corners.

"David thought I hated him. I didn't really. I wasn't even concerned with him."

"No, Missus."

"I punished him when he was bad, that's all. I never thought about him one way or the other."

"No, Missus."

"He used to lie. I punished him for that, I remember."

"Yes, Missus. It must have been a long time ago, Missus. He's probably forgotten all about it. Boys, you know, Missus, they don't remember . . . for so long. I'll bet it's all forgotten about, it's so long ago."

"Yes." Mrs. Albany's head drooped forward, "Yes," she repeated absently, "it was a long time ago, of course." She scratched Pinkie's ear and smiled slightly, "Long ago."

But suddenly she was raving and frantic again, "Lies!" she shrieked. All the years had passed without ever in the least softening or dimming that appalling memory. "Lies! Lies! Lies!" She raised her hand to her head and the knotted, dark fingers clawed at her wispy, faded hair, harrowed in desperation, drew slowly down over one side of her face, pulled the sagging flesh back taut from her cheekbone, eye slanted like a Chinaman's, the fingers travelled over her neck, leaving red striations, fiddled with the high collar of her dress, with the jet, cameo brooch at her throat, plucked helplessly at the wraps and woollens and scarves.

"You see, it all happened on one day. In a few seconds of one

day. That's all it took. I found out all the lies. That's all there was. That was the end. In a few seconds. After that there was never any truth, except the one truth of his lies and lying to me, always lies and lies, always true. Well . . ." She leaned back and stared at the ceiling. "Lies—he lied to me, deceived me. There are two crimes in lying, not one, two hurts, two agonies. That Stephen had lied to me was only half the pain, that I had believed him, that I had been foolish enough to believe enough so that I was deceived, that was the other.

"I had trusted him and believed in him and now I could see what a fool I had been. I could see that I had been a fool from the very beginning, so I had made it easy for him to deceive me and take advantage of my innocence and trust. I was blind because I made the mistake of thinking that he was decent and honest and trustworthy. This was my punishment. I was condemned to suffer for always and always these unending tortures in bitterness and sorrow and despair because I had thought my husband good."

Abruptly she fell silent and bowed her head.

"Oh Missus, oh Missus . . ."

"Annie, it was a long time ago. It was very long ago."

"Yes, Missus."

"Annie, will you sit with me for a little while. Get a chair and sit with me. I don't want to talk any more, but will you sit with me for a little?"

Jessica Albany was watching David, suddenly grown long legged, kicking a soccer ball across the lawn. She frowned, I hope it doesn't go in the flower bed. Maidie apparently was there to catch it, because although she was out of sight the ball came bouncing slowly back towards David.

Boarding school was a mixed blessing, it would have been unendurable to have the boy underfoot all the time, but he certainly picked up some undesirable passions there such as this soccer ball

phase he was going through, though not much else that would justify all the money they spent on him. Holidays certainly were a trial.

Jessica would have been glad if Maidie likewise could have been got out of the house but Stephen in one of the rare instances when he opposed her wishes insisted that Maidie should stay. "Girls," he said, "should grow up at home," and it had to be left at that. Also it turned out that Maidie was a great help in looking after Dissy.

Maidie must have been there somewhere behind the trees throwing the ball back to David. Her own darling baby was playing quietly further down the sloping lawn, golden haired, fresh and rosy in a new starched dress, pink with a sash of forget-me-not-blue. She was playing a pretty game on the grass running around and around. Nanny, of course, sitting on a folding canvas stool down there by the rhododendrons, was looking after her.

Jessica could not have been more remote if she had been a perfect stranger happening to chance there on the sun porch as she eyed her baby, insouciant, gay, in her mind, not even a child so much as a species of marvellous butterfly or bird, there running about in clumsy circles, her hair streamed out behind her as she ran, her hands stretched out with lovely, unconscious grace.

Musing that she had seen all this before, years before, when Dissy was not yet born, dreamed it when she stood on a bare hill looking down at brambles and honeysuckle and pale wild grass, seeing not that, but instead all this that was yet in the future, the lovely lawn and gracious trees and far below the inlet of shining water.

David kicked the ball again. It went in a high, wide arc. The frown was still on her face. He was a boy without one trace of charm. Well. At the back of her mind was something else. She crossed to the open casement window and called out, "David, don't let the ball go into the flower beds." It was tiresome to be warning him all the time. The sound of her own voice surprised her, it was fretful and shrewish, so she repeated, "David, don't let

the ball go into the flower beds," now in a voice that pleased her, tolerant and sweet sounding.

The boy started guiltily and turned his head towards her, his eyes rolled disagreeably upwards leaving two little lines of whites showing.

"No, I won't."

"No *what?*"

He was standing perfectly rigid holding the ball in front of him, his elbows close to his side. Out of the corner of her eye she caught sight of Maidie, standing just where she had guessed on the other side of the lawn. For some reason the girl had an unhealthy, starved look. Her hair was messy and stringy; she was wearing a faded, cotton print and a ragged sweater. She looked like the gardener's daughter or the cook's. If the truth were told, there was something common about both those children.

"No *what?*" she repeated to David. Common or not they could at least acquire manners.

"No, Mother, I won't."

She'd wrung it out of him. She might have taken exception to his tone of voice, it sounded sulky and stubborn. Oh well, let it go, she was too far away to be really able to tell with certainty.

There was something else at the back of her mind. Something about Stephen. Although the sun outdoors seemed to be hot enough, there was a chill in the air flowing in through the open window. She shivered suddenly and before turning away she closed the casement. She noticed some dust on the sill. Heaven knows there were enough servants in the house and they spent enough money on them. But just when she was about to ring for Alice, the girl appeared peeping in through the door, ingenuously carrying a duster and broom.

"I was going to say, Alice, that there's dust on the sill here."

"Yes, Mum, I was just waiting for you to get through here."

"I'm tired of finding dust all over the house."

"Yes, Mum."

The girl, woman rather, she must have been at least forty, had a bland, wide face and an imperturbably good temper. "If you're through in here, Mum, I'll begin," she said cheerfully.

"Yes, Alice, I'm through." She took her things, a book she had been reading in a desultory fashion, holding the place with her finger, a light shawl, the reading glasses she had just begun to wear, a handkerchief. She wandered idly across the hall to the parlour, Alice had just finished in here, the place gleamed and smelled of furniture polish; the pillows were stiff and puffed up on the couch, Jessica picked them up, one by one, by the corners and threw them down again a little less formally—Alice never could learn how; she bent down and ran her finger along the white moulding, the wood was still a little damp from being scrubbed; she continued out through another door through Stephen's office, looked with distaste at his desk that he wouldn't let anyone touch, then on upstairs to her room.

As she mounted the stairs she had a curious feeling that some one was watching her from below. She stiffened her shoulders, whoever it was had no business being there, when she turned the hall was quite empty. Well. Oh, it was a remembered feeling. From earlier that morning.

It was an incident so small that it could not have been recalled in any other way than through the physical repetition and association. She had said goodbye to Stephen who was leaving for the city. He had told her quite casually that he might be late that night because there was a medical meeting that he had to attend and not to wait dinner for him.

"Yes, Stephen." In the mornings she was never wide awake, her mind worked groggily. Something, a vague thought or feeling, something she meant to say to him rose in her mind, she frowned, it was provoking to be so stupid, whatever it was would have to wait.

"I thought . . ." she started hesitantly and then the words poured out without any particular volition, indeed she wasn't even certain what she was saying or whether it was what she had meant

to say, "I thought that it was the medical meeting that kept you late yesterday."

"No," he answered gently, "that was the Doctor's Society."

"Oh."

He ducked his head and she felt his lips dryly brush her cheek, she drew back. Then she pressed his hand, "Well, tootle-oo." The sun shone in through the narrow leaded windows on both sides of the door—it did so only for a few minutes each morning when the sun was still low in the sky, and it gave the hall an odd, unfamiliar look, Stephen standing before her with the light behind him seemed to rise up very tall and solid, casting his shadow before him. When she drew back she noticed dreamily that she stepped into the middle of his shadow and then altogether out of the sunlight.

He stood pulling on his gloves. "Tootle-oo," she repeated and started up the stairs. It was then, halfway up she felt his eyes on her.

The staircase itself was magnificent—very wide. (Oh how she had fought with the architect whom they engaged to build the house for them. He had wanted to save space and expense by making the stairs narrow. When she complained of the original plan he had offered her a niggling four inches. Four inches! She snorted contemptuously. I want the stairs so wide that when I stand here I can stretch my arms out and not touch either the banister on one side or the wall on the other.) She had her wide stairway with low risers, thick carpeting a glorious crimson. When she mounted the stairs she felt like a queen.

Stephen looked at her, of course he looked at her, she felt his look and smiling turned. His face was raised as his glance met hers, but he did not return her smile, rather he looked grave and somewhat displeased. Oh!

"What is it?" Then he was smiling. She had imagined it. Her heart was warm within her. She was looking at him and suddenly it seemed that he was at once completely strange and completely hers. He is beautiful, I love him. Not the words, she had said the

words over and over, feeling for this instant love and a crashing pain, shattering and immediate as a physical shock, but in no place, in no part of her. Head or body. She started down towards him, but at that moment he lifted his hand in salute and went out the door.

It passed in that second and she continued up the stairs touching the hand rail delicately and thinking then merely that she must remember to tell cook not to wait dinner for Dr. Albany, that he was likely to be delayed.

Now it came back to her, the little happening that had depth but no extent. She looked slowly around the empty hall; the sunshine had long since left the narrow side windows, all that remained was a diffuse blue-green reflected up from the tiled flooring of the portico. One of her hands lay lightly on the smooth, wide mahogany railing, the other that held the book, the shawl, the glasses and handkerchief, she pressed against her body awaiting a repetition of that sensation of love.

Slowly, wraithlike now, a dim echo but for all that distinct, it bloomed within her sending out long fingers of warmth throughout her being.

Love this house and all that's in it, that table that stands beside the wall, the mirror above it, that vase, the flowers that are in it, the cabinet, that carved Italian chair, that corner of the rug that I can see from here. And Stephen. And our child. And all the children.

Just as before anguish accompanied strangely the feeling of love less painful now for the other too was less intense; confusing and disquieting however, and persisting even longer. She passed on up the stairs frowning.

It was the oddness of the experience that impressed her. At the end of the upstairs hall was a mirror; she saw in it a tall young woman with light hair, a little wild-eyed and frowning hurrying towards her, but even as she looked the image changed, the chin was raised and the mouth hardened: the Jessica she knew stared back at her with lofty satisfaction. She swept regally into the bed-

room to discover to her intense annoyance that Anna was still making up the room, the windows were open wide and the bed-clothes piled on a chair while panting and laboriously the girl was turning the mattress.

"Anna," Jessica rapped out sharply, "I'm not satisfied at all with the condition of the house."

"Mum?"

She was a stunted little person, almost dwarfish with a great mass of dark hair that she wore in an untidy bun at the back of her neck. Although she was not more than twenty-five, there was nothing youthful about her face or figure, indeed she belonged to that race of drudges that hardens before it ripens and therefore never blooms nor fades.

"I'm not satisfied with the house. I find dust all over."

"Yes, Mum." The answer came back sad and resigned. She was still panting from her exertions of turning the heavy mattress, now she stood with her head a little bowed, her red arms lax and helpless at her sides. "I'm sorry, Mum."

"I don't want it to happen any more. You understand!"

"Yes, Mum."

"I've spoken to Alice about it, but you're both responsible, hear!"

"Yes, Mum."

Jessica glanced around the room once more then back at the maid. "Be sure to put square corners on the sheets the way I showed you." She always raised her voice a little when talking to Anna for the girl's inevitable "Yes, Mum's" were almost inaudible.

"Yes, Mum."

Jessica looked back at the dresser, there was something indefinably odd about it, something missing. The whole room looked dreadful however, in the process of being made up and cold from the open windows. Shivering, she decided that whatever was wrong with the dresser could wait. Anna cringed before her, in-

finitely stupid, abject creature. Well, there wasn't much use in upbraiding her, she probably did the best she could.

"I hope that trouble you were having with your back is better now."

"Yes, Mum. Thank you, Mum."

People like Anna always had trouble with their backs or they had bunions and dreadful things happened to members of their families, they'd lose an arm or a leg.

"Dr. Albany, Mum, gave me something for it."

"That's good," Jessica replied dryly. She turned on her heel and left the room. The trouble with Stephen, she was thinking, is that he always has to make everybody like him, the servants, the children, gardeners, newsboys. His barber probably worships the ground he walks on.

She looked back into the room. "Where are the pictures that belong on the bureau, Anna."

"They're right here on this chair next to the window, Mum. I was looking at them for a minute. I'll put them right back, Mum."

"I think you'd better, Anna." I suppose she'd like it if I gave her the picture of Stephen.

She went into the bathroom and carefully bathed her face, alternating hot water and cold water, and then rubbed on a little cream before dusting it over with powder.

Thus, in a way, oddly enough, Jessica was perfectly prepared when Alice came and announced, "There's a person waiting to see you, Mum." She had combed her hair, the fresh and meticulously applied makeup on her face made her feel at her best, she was wearing a simple morning frock, but it was one of her most becoming ones, she knew. She frowned at Alice's unbreakable habit of announcing people as "a person waiting to see you, Mum," who could be anyone from Pamela Sedgwick to the King of Spain.

"Yes, Alice, who did you say it was?" Though, of course, such subtle irony was completely wasted on the beetle-headed Alice.

"Oh," said Alice, "she said she was a Mrs. Passenger or something like that."

Jessica bit her lip, "Did she say what she wanted?"

"Oh no, Mum. First she asked to see Dr. Albany and then when he turned out not to be here, she said she'd see you. She's waiting in the hall, she has a little boy with her."

Jessica turned and stared out of the window. So that was it, obviously not a lady, for Alice whatever her shortcomings discriminated finely on who should be shown to the parlour; it was on the tip of her tongue to tell Alice to say she wasn't home to whoever it was, but then as she was completely unoccupied at the moment, she thought better of it.

She paused at the top of the stairs peering down, as the floor was heavily carpeted her footsteps were completely muffled and the woman below was unaware of her presence. Mrs. Passenger—whatever her name was—was perched on the antique, carved oak settle, and although she was fairly plump, the hugeness of the piece of furniture diminished her and the little boy, gave them both a pathetic, vulnerable aspect, her feet in scuffed black shoes dangled helplessly, unable to reach the floor.

Her pale face was all but hidden by a dark cloche hat that was pulled down over her forehead and covered a good part of her cheeks as well, moreover a fringe of stiff, black curls extended all around below the hat.

Just the same, Jessica as she approached had the feeling that she had seen the woman before. When Jessica was halfway down the stairs, the woman turned and saw her. She immediately got up and pulled the child stiffly to his feet beside her. Obviously she was a suppliant, but at the same time there was something curiously ominous about her, menacing. It was the third time that day that Jessica had paused on the stairs looking down, now a deep feeling of misgiving and fear went through her. She raised her head, "Well, what is it?"

The woman didn't answer, instead she nervously and unnecessarily smoothed the child's hair, that thin and stuck to his head

with water gave him the aspect of a licked kitten. It was odd that she had brought the boy along at all; servants looking for hire usually hide them at home, and produce them only once they have secured the job. Jessica was virtually certain now that that was what the woman sought. Well, it was just too bad, the last thing she wanted was a maid with a brat.

"What is it, Mrs. . . . Mrs. Passenger?"

"The name is Bessenger, Mrs. Bessenger," said the woman timidly, almost inaudibly. But Jessica recognised the voice, now she knew who it was, though the slim form had become stout and unwieldy, trimness and neatness had disappeared into dowdy poverty, the manner once so perfect and efficient, had slackened into this frightened obsequiousness.

Jessica frowned, "Josette, why didn't you say so at once?"

"I'm different, Ma'am, I'm so different from the way I was."

"Yes." Jessica spoke coldly.

The difference was a fantastic, unbelievable difference. Little Josette, that beautifully trained French maid, so trim and smart in her black uniform with a doily-like apron and stiff cuffs, a triangular white hat on her curly black hair. She always remembered to close the door behind her and never spoke unless she was spoken to. In many ways the most perfect maid that Jessica had ever had, she had left four years earlier to get married, she had said. That—and this, this hairy sheep dog, this poodle! Jessica glanced at the child. He must have been at least three and a half.

"Well, Josette, what do you want?"

"I wanted to speak to you, Ma'am . . ." she hesitated, then raised her eyes dumbly looking up at Alice who hung over the banisters.

"Alice, perhaps you have something better to do?" said Jessica with annoyance, continued sharply, "I'm rather busy, Josette, at the moment . . ." the dark pleading eyes under the woolly bangs reminded her of—of a sheepdog's or a poodle's; she smiled inwardly for she indulged herself in never resisting a dog's wistful

appeal. "Well, Josette, for a few minutes then. I suppose you came all the way out from the city today."

"Yes, Ma'am."

Suffused with a pleasant sense of virtue and well doing, Jessica ushered the two into the glassed-in sun porch. She herself sat down on the chaise longue and pointing to a small straight chair opposite, said with her most gracious manner, "Sit down, sit down. I imagine you walked from the station too."

"Yes, Ma'am."

Jessica reflected once more on the loveliness of the view from the porch over the lawn; Dissy still played there, though David and Maidie had taken themselves out of sight, the soft plup-plup of the soccer ball on the grass could still be heard. Inside the porch, the air was heavy with the odour of potted gardenias mixed subtly with the commoner smells of out of doors that flowed in the open window. Plainly little Josette was overwhelmed with awe. She sat stiffly with her hand clenched in her lap, unable to say a word.

"Well," said Jessica kindly, rather patronisingly, "Is this your little boy? What's his name? What's your name, Sonny?"

The child merely stared at her out of eyes that looked too large and dark for such a wan little face. He had a wizened look of cleverness that children often have who are small for their age, he was thin and pinched looking, his head was too big for the skinny, stalklike neck and tended to droop sideways or forwards.

"Chéri. That's not his name, of course, but we call him Chéri."

The child smiled faintly at his mother, and then turned and included Jessica in his amiable look.

"Josette, you remember Dissy. There she is down on the lawn."

"Oh yes, Ma'am. Such a sweet baby she was. What a beautiful little girl." Then she stopped suddenly and looked into her lap, and her hands closed convulsively over her thin leather pocket book. "Chéri is a very good boy, Ma'am, I mean he never causes any trouble."

"I'm sure of that, Josette."

"I mean he knows he must be good."

"Yes, Josette." And I know what you want, Josette, and it's just too bad, Josette, but the answer is no. Jessica's eyes hardened but she kept on smiling.

"It is very unfortunate." Josette sighed and the dark eyes wistfully stole a glance through the screening mat of hair to see if there was any use in going on, knowing that useless or not, she needs must go on, seeing the chilly, hard face and the anomalous smile. "It is very unfortunate," she repeated, "I mean it's difficult to find a place with a child, you see I want to keep him with me, you see his father, my husband, I mean, Mr. Bessenger, when he ah . . . he died, it is necessary for me to work again, and I thought . . . well I have been to so many ladies, ah there are many ladies, and the agents, but he . . . but Chéri . . . I want to keep him with me, he is all I have and . . . nobody . . ."

Poor Josette, what a different Josette, what a little fool she had been. She had stopped talking suddenly and she sat with her head bowed, her hands fumbling with the purse in her lap.

"Josette, I am very sorry to hear all this. I would sincerely like to help you if I knew how, you know that, but there aren't any openings here, you didn't think there would be surely, why I don't know whether we'll be able to afford keeping everybody much longer. Prices of everything go up and up and up and there are so many expenses, many, many expenses and obligations. But I'll tell you what I will do, I'll tell my friends about you. Somebody might have something. And then I can let you know. You let me have your address so I can let you know if anything turns up."

She arose and crossed to a table where there was a pad of blank paper and a pencil for she often sat out here when she was getting the lists ready for the cook. She was glad to get up, in any case, it made it easier to bring this interview to an end which by now she was finding painful. She returned brightly, saying aloud as she wrote down, Mrs. Josette Bessenger. That's B-e-s-s-e-n-g-e-r, isn't it?"

But Josette hadn't moved; even her hands became perfectly still.

"Josette!" a little sharply.

"Ma'am, if I could just stay, some place and work, if we could both stay, I mean, and you wouldn't . . . I mean I wouldn't have to be paid hardly anything, just a little to get him things, Chéri, I mean, he doesn't need very much, a few clothes next winter, he grows very slowly, I mean, it wouldn't have to be hardly anything at all, if I could only just stay some place."

"Josette, I'm sure that something will turn up."

"If there were some old clothes that nobody needed any more, I could make them over for him."

"Probably there are some old things of David's around. You remember David, don't you. Yes, I'm sure there are some. I'll send them along to you. Now you just give me your address and I'll send them there and I'll find out what my friends have to say."

Her voice had risen and had suddenly acquired a hard, metallic timbre, she spoke more quickly than usual and somewhat at random, clacking away like a talking machine, she realised it herself, and realising it felt herself angered and annoyed with this creature who sat so silently and stubbornly before her, a servant sitting while she stood, that was beside the point, of course, but it crossed her mind, "I'm merely trying to help you, I don't know what more I can do than what I've already suggested, I don't know what you expected coming here like this . . ." There was something obdurate, hard and impenitent about the woman, abject as she was, unreclaimed, she has brought it on herself, Josette has brought all this upon herself, it flashed through Jessica's mind, she herself clack, clack, clack on like a precision machine stamping out words, ". . . however, you just give me your address and I'll send the clothes along, and any openings I hear about. And I believe that pretty soon the station wagon is going down town for supplies so you won't have to walk all the way to the depot. Go around back and ask Cook, she'll be able to tell you. Ask her—tell her I told you to ask her—for a glass of milk for Chéri here,

and a piece of bread and butter, he'd like that, wouldn't he? Only first give me your address so I can send you . . ."

The half starved child was standing there before her eyes, she could not do less, the mother cringed there, bowing down her head and her mouth—her mouth was the only feature of her face that was not hidden or altered by the hat or by the grotesque fringe of hair—the mouth fully exposed, tight shut in a hard, stubborn line.

Suddenly Josette stood up, what a figure she cut, fat and dowdy, the hat, the thin, ragged coat with a little piece of moth-eaten fur at the throat, stretched tight and pulling the buttons sideways and awry over the too ample bosom, one hand grasping firmly at the match stick of a child, "I only came," she said, "to see Dr. Albany. He was so good to me before."

"Stephen! What, Stephen!"

Jessica stepped back repeating stupidly, "Stephen? Stephen? What did Stephen ever do for you!"

"Oh he did everything, Ma'am. He was wonderful. He did everything. Dr. Albany did, he's a dear, kind, good man. Oh Ma'am I wasn't to tell you. Look!" She pointed at the child. "Chéri, you asked me his name. His real name is Stephen. I took the liberty to call him . . . after that dear, wonderful man . . . if Chéri should grow up to be . . . I couldn't really hope . . . I mean if he can only be a little bit as good, as kind . . ."

Jessica sat down again on the chaise longue, practically fell into it, jarred her back hard, but she did not know it, she felt faint and dizzy and numb and far away. The birds outside were singing and the water of the Sound was lap-lapping against the shore, and there were the children's voices calling out and laughing and there was the soccer ball plup-plup so softly on the lawn. Air flowed through the window, the air that had seemed chilly to her before so that she had closed another window in another room, cool now, merely, pleasant, blowing gently on her face bearing in the sweet outdoor smells of grass and syringa and honeysuckle, blowing on her face, looking and seeing the child, strawberry pink and

forget-me-not blue, her child, her only child, and the sunshine in mild circles as big as silver dollars dappling the lawn beneath the elms, the flowers, the roses in bloom, the green grass, the blue sky. And she would never see, nor hear, nor feel anything again. Stephen.

Only this . . . only this . . . "as good, as kind, as that wonderful, good man, Dr. Albany, Ma'am, Dr. Stephen Albany . . ." anything ever again, but only this.

"Stephen," she said weakly, and her mind might have been a many chambered gallery echoing over and over, Stephen, Stephen, Stephen, Stephen. "Stephen," she said again and her mind iterated and reiterated, Stephen, Stephen, Stephen, Stephen.

"I will probably be delayed tonight. Tell Cook not to wait supper for me. I will be coming home late tonight. There is a meeting tonight that I must attend. Jessica, I'm sorry, I shan't be able to make it home, tonight. I'll be late. I've been delayed here at the hospital." There is no end of it. A doctor's wife gets used to never seeing her husband come home. Stephen, Stephen, Stephen, Stephen.

"Dr. Albany was good to me."

Was good to me, was good to me, repeated itself, was good to me. You, you poor little fool, you call it being good to you. Good to you.

"Why," she managed to say, "did you come to me?"

"You?" she paused a minute, time passed by, time was passing by. "You? I came to see Dr. Albany, Ma'am. I remembered he was here, only when I had come I found he wasn't home. She, that other person before, she told me I should wait and speak to you, Ma'am, but I came to see Dr. Albany who was so good to me before."

So good to me before, so good to me.

"Oh maybe I shouldn't be telling you. But you understand. I knew you'd understand."

"Yes, oh yes."

"But he was a doctor and he took care of that, all of that. And

the hospital, all of that, and then he found the place for me to go that home for me to go with Chéri when I was getting better and after, with Mrs. Cattledge, Mrs. Cattledge was a dear, sweet woman, Lord rest her soul, she died, she loved little Chéri like he was her own little grandson, and she dressed him in lace and silk and if he cried, she said, 'Josette, don't bother what you're doing now for me, go and see what he wants.' But she died, after a year, she died, and I'll never have a place like that again, me and Chéri won't have a place like that again even if we live to be a thousand years old, not like Mrs. Cattledge was. I've had other places since, but none of them were any good, they'd say, 'You have to send Chéri away, Josette, you can't have him here,' and Chéri's as quiet as a mouse all day long and he stays in my room and never makes a sound, but they begrudge him the food he eats, they begrudge the little tiny amount of food a little child eats, oh Ma'am, people in the world are that cruel and hardhearted, begrudging the little tiny bit of food a baby puts in his mouth, I couldn't stay there, Ma'am, I couldn't stay in any of those places. And I've looked, and I've looked, but there was nothing, there was no place and I was thinking it was better if we were dead, if both of us were dead, only then I thought about Dr. Albany, Ma'am, the good Dr. Albany, and so I've come home."

She had quieted at last, she had stopped talking, and she stood silent with her hands on each of the boy's skinny shoulders, finished with her story, her head bowed down.

"Yes," Jessica was saying feebly, "yes, oh yes, I see . . . so, then you didn't get married after all . . ." Stupidly, there are worse things than stupidity, after all, "I had thought you were going to be married, that, that was why you left, to get married, but you didn't after all."

"No, Ma'am . . . I couldn't you see. I know, Ma'am, maybe you think it's wicked and immoral, but I've been punished enough for all these years I've been punished, and it didn't seem so wicked and immoral, then, I mean, it seemed like only a little thing, and I thought we'd get married, I thought that right along, he told

loved me so much and everything, I never misdoubted but we'd get married sometime."

"I thought he'd marry *you*!"

"I did, surely, I swear I did. He said he wanted to only we had to wait and I thought he wanted to, I believed it, what he told me. Only after, when it was too late, then he wouldn't."

"Josette, you're lying!"

"Oh no, Ma'am, I swear I'm not, it's the truth, so help me God, it's the truth. I mean, maybe I wasn't so anxious at first to marry him, till after, that's the truth, then I was, until I found out about him, and how he'd been deceiving me, then I wouldn't have married him for anything, even though I needed to be married then, I wouldn't have married him and that's the truth, only I never thought that if I wanted to we couldn't, I thought all along that maybe we would, and that's the truth, I swear to you."

"You're lying, lying, lying!"

"No, Ma'am, I swear I'm not. I never knew till it was too late that that Bassanio was married already."

"Bassanio!"

"Yes, Ma'am, Bassanio Locatelli, you know who used to work . . ." Desperate as she was, a sudden look of comprehension flashed into those strange, hidden eyes. "Bassanio, Ma'am, who did you think . . . !"

Poor Josette, poor little foolish unfortunate Josette. She smiled.

"Get out of here, you slut, get out, get out, get out of here, I say, don't you ever come here again, you dirty little lying slut, get out. Get out!"

The local telephone operators were a gregarious, talkative, friendly, not particularly efficient group of girls. They had spoony conversations by the hour with any man with a smooth voice who called in, telephone subscribers often got a voice with a giggle, that said, "Hello, I mean number, please?", there would be humming and laughter in the background, and any really long

distance call threw the office into complete confusion, a number of out-of-town calls would have a similar result.

Jessica put calls through to Stephen's office, and to the hospital and to the clinic, she tried all the places he was supposed to be.

"I want to speak to Dr. Albany. This is Mrs. Albany. I want to speak to him. Yes, at once, it's important. I must speak to him. Operator, operator, don't shut me off. Yes, I was cut off for a minute. Yes, I tell you I want to speak to Dr. Albany. Can you hear me? This is Mrs. Albany.

"Where is he then. Give me the number to call. Tell him to call me back if I don't reach him. Yes. I'm at home. Of course I'm at home.

"Operator, operator, I want to make another call. Please give me this number. Yes, and don't interrupt me. You cut me off before. Yes. That's the number I said. Is Dr. Albany there? This is Mrs. Albany. No, no, operator, please connect me. Yes, can you hear me now. There's a buzzing, no I can hardly hear you. Operator, I can't get through. Yes. Hello, hello. I'm trying to call Dr. Albany. Operator, you gave me the wrong number. Yes, that's the number I told you. I don't know what number you gave me. Hello, hello. Is Dr. Albany there? This is Mrs. Albany. Can you tell me where I can reach him. Yes. It's important. When he comes in then, yes, when he comes in . . .

"Operator, this is another number, don't give me the same number again. No the telephone is not out of order. I'm trying to make an out-of-town call. Yes. No. Look, this is Mrs. Albany again, Dr. Albany wasn't where you said, I called that number but he wasn't there yet. Where do you think I can get hold of him now. It's an emergency. It's absolutely necessary that I reach him . . . yes . . . yes . . . Operator, get off the wire! . . . Hello, Hello. Is Dr. Albany there, this is Mrs. Albany . . . oh, oh, oh, . . . no . . . not . . ."

Then she was sitting by the absolutely silent telephone, finished with that, there hadn't been any use in that, of course not, Stephen wouldn't answer the phone, he wouldn't even be near one or a

his office or at the hospital or at any of the places where innocently he might be expected to be. Of course not.

She sat for what must have been a long while there next to the telephone resting her elbow on the little table where it stood and resting her head on that hand while with her other hand she played quite witlessly with the fringe of the light cashmere shawl, that still draped over her arm, pulling at the soft, loose threads until at last she realised what she was doing so that she thought in a peculiar dreamy way, Alice had been listening and possibly Anna and Cook too, undoubtedly the receiver of every extension telephone in the house had been cautiously lifted up and pressed against a snooping ear, and then a long while after she didn't want to sit there any longer and she got shakily to her feet, even if Stephen should get any of her messages and call her back she wouldn't want to speak to him, she walked numbly, restlessly through the rooms of the house, her heels clacking on the floor.

From time to time she stopped and looked around, until she realised she had stopped and the realisation drove her restlessly on. She had stopped at the end of the hall and was looking out the window at the path that Josette had gone down with the child, the stout little woman pulling the boy by the hand, the last she had seen and she would never see her again, that much was certain.

Lies.

Then she found herself out-of-doors striding wildly across the terrace and down the gravel path pursuing what she would not ever want to see again, compelled after the remembered image of the woman and the child, but, of course, it was much later and the two had gone.

Lies.

The path had taken her to the edge of the property and she stood uncertainly there at the gate looking up and down the quiet, empty street. It was a wide avenue with a green strip down the middle planted with shade trees and the houses on each side were set well back behind wide lawns or elaborate gardens.

Everything here spoke of wealth and prosperity and dream come true. Substantial, solid, timeless, what money could buy in brick and stone and carefully cultivated nature. Across the street, the Wycoffs' gardener was busy with his assistant setting out flowering plants, working with infiniteness slowness and loving care; it was a shaded spot and in order to have the bright, sun loving blooms it was necessary to replant the bed constantly.

Lies.

Even as she looked the scene was blasted, the lawns scorched, the flowers dead in the shade, the great homes crumbled away, she walked in the infinite lunar landscape of despair. She began savagely tearing the leaves off a little bush that stood near by and throwing them on the ground. It had so happened that no one had ever lied to her before, she had had no experience of being deceived ever before. It so happens, Stephen, that you, my loving husband, are the first to acquaint me with this perfidy.

Jessica suddenly drew back behind the hedge, a limousine glided by, chauffeur driven with four young women in big hats and light summer dresses; they were all her friends, they had started to turn and wave white gloved hands at Jessica and smile impeccable greetings, but when she had disappeared they turned again to each other, carried off immediately in the chariot of their own affairs as with the incredibly smoothly moving automobile that took them slowly out of sight up the Butterfields' winding drive.

With terrible bitterness, Jessica recalled that she too had been invited to go to the Butterfields' that day for luncheon. She looked down at her hands, they had turned green from the leaves of the little bush, for after she had stripped them off she had crushed them in her palm and thrown them on the ground.

Then she turned and hurried back up the path again and for all her desperateness she could clearly see herself a poor, wild, white faced creature with hunted eyes and hair flying, the soft white scarf streamed out behind her and as she turned a crooked way in the path the scarf caught on a branch of a tree, she yanked it loose and the tears ran down her cheeks, weeping for the poor, torn

scarf. "Oh—oh," gossamer threads of wool still clung to the branch. For always and always after, this would be true, only this would be true, when all the rest was lies and lying.

Now she had come out on the lawn, and looking down she caught sight of her little baby, she was kneeling on the grass, her bright head almost touching the ground, and even at this distance she could hear her laugh, shrill, sweet baby sound of delight. As she stood there she saw herself desperately running towards the child and taking her up in her arms, for comfort, for a little comfort.

But before she had taken more than a few steps she encountered David and Maidie. Both children had a strange frightened look. Curiously enough, David stood holding the ball rigidly in front of his chest, with his elbows drawn in, in the identical position that he had assumed earlier that day, his face was turned towards her and the dark eyes rolled fearfully up in his head.

"Well, what's the matter, children?" she said crisply.

"I—I, the ball, I mean."

"Yes."

"It was my fault," Maidie broke in.

"The ball went in the flowers." David pointed to one of the beds, a noble stalk of delphinium lay on its side, two others, their spires knocked awry rose from the crushed leaves of basket-of-gold and poppies, and baby's breath.

"How many times have I told you to be careful!" She was oddly calm, she merely laid her hand gently on his shoulder and said, "David, can you remember how many times I have told you to be careful?"

"Oh, you've told me and told me, I know."

"It's my fault, Mother, really it is. I let the ball go in the garden. David kicked it right to me, but I was clumsy and it went in the flowers."

Jessica looked idly at the little girl and then back at the boy. "Yes, yes," she answered presently. "But something should be done, don't you think? Apparently my asking you to be careful

doesn't do any good, does it and I simply can't stand lies and lying."

The children looked at her with astonishment. "You hear," she went on. "I won't stand for it. If I have to break every bone in your body, David, I'll teach you not to lie!"

"Really, it's my fault, Mother!" said Maidie passionately.

"Well, you go to your room this minute." Maidie backed away slowly, "You David, come with me." Her hand was still on his shoulder and she shook it gently. "Go to your room this instant, I say!"

Now she slowly propelled David before her, she noticed his skinny shoulders and his shoulder blades protruding under the thin cloth of his shirt. They went in silence, the young girl far in advance, walking more quickly but constantly looking back over her shoulder, the boy and close behind him the woman, going slowly up and across the lawn under the long shadows of the tree; when they got to the terrace the children in their sneakers made no sound, but Jessica's high heels clacked sharply on the tile. Once inside the house, Maidie proceeded obediently directly up the stairs, but Jessica guided David into the sun porch. She pointed to an empty space on the shelf between the pots of maidenhair fern.

"Put the ball there, David. There was a little poor boy here this morning and I'm going to give him some of your old clothes and toys. You would like him to have the ball now, wouldn't you, since you won't be able to use it any more."

The child gave her a beseeching, agonised look. "Put it there, I say," she said more sharply. When he had done as he was told, she took the scarf from her shoulder, and folding it carefully placed it in front of the ball. "See, I'm going to give my scarf to the poor child's mother."

The boy stared at her, all the blood had fled from his face leaving it white and cloudy looking, there was a spattering of freckles over his cheeks and the bridge of his nose, which looked darkened and pronounced in his paleness, also there were greyish circles under his eyes. He doesn't get enough sleep, she thought dispass-

sionately, or perhaps it's liver, a touch of liver. After a moment he averted his eyes, a funny, sneaky guilty way of sliding his eyes away from her look that made her furious.

"Just where do you think you're going!" she rapped out for he had started away.

"I thought you wanted me to go to my room, Mother."

"I didn't tell you any such thing." She stamped her foot. "My God, will you never learn. You come with me, you hear."

She ceased to think or know what she was doing, merely the sense of fury that rose in her, thick and hot, in an odd way pleasant, thus as she seized the boy and pushed him before her out of the sun porch and down the hall, she was only remotely aware of him, for seconds at a time she seemed to be blinded and groped her way forward, then in dazzling brightness the scene before her returned, she was standing before the rack that held Stephen's canes. Then she recalled that what she was looking for would not be there, but in the closet with her riding equipment, a crop, a heavier one than she ever used on Blackwitch, the mare she customarily rode, she had brought it home, the reason obscure even to herself months before and thrown it on the floor of the closet. She found it and cut the air with it a couple of times.

"This will do," she said.

Now she was pushing him up the stairs. It crossed her mind that she had never thought of using a horse whip on a boy before, and for some reason it struck her as excruciatingly funny and she began to laugh. She laughed till the tears came to her eyes.

But she didn't proceed at once about the business. When she got to her room, she made David wait while she washed her hands and face and combed her hair. Then she got out the Bible. It was a small, pretty volume bound in white calf-skin with rice paper and gilt edges, her Mother had given it to her on her twelfth birthday. She found the place she wanted very quickly and handed the open book to David.

"Read me the story of Ananias and Sapphira his wife."

The beastly little coward was snivelling and crying, but she

waited patiently for him to finish, then she made him count the verses.

"I will hit you twice for every verse. I think that will be fair and it will teach you not to lie. How many verses are there, David."

"Ten?"

She took the book and read, "'And great fear came upon all the church, and upon as many as heard these things.' Perhaps we don't have to include that, David, still I think it would be a good thing if you were to be *afraid* of lying. Fear is a good deterrent, you know. I think we should call it eleven verses."

Afterwards she sent him to his room. Then she lay down on her bed and drew the quilt up to her chin. She was panting and she felt oddly weak and tremulous. She stared blankly at the ceiling, then suddenly she relaxed and fell asleep.

The old woman slept. The very exhaustions engendered by her terrors at last had made Mrs. Albany tranquil and serene, dropping off to doze, starting out of it with a good humoured smile at Mrs. Tandy, maintaining still, no, she wouldn't go to bed just yet, merely an old woman's whim, harmless enough to give in to, isn't it, Annie, the fact of vigil still upheld, but the passion gone and her head began to nod.

She saw the pointed head of Shep on the floor beside her foot and Spot's black wolf brush on the other side, sleepily she looked around for Pinkie, discovered her at length curled up directly under her chair, then her eyes drooped closed just as she was trying to think of some last recollection, lost it in a silly dream of trying on shoes, waked up enough to judge and think, it is silly, I have not even been inside a shoe store for at least four years.

Saw, just as she was dropping off to sleep once more, Mrs. Tandy's huge form tiptoeing away through the crooked aisle between the furniture, she walked so quietly she might have been merely a great shadow, or a footless cloud moving across the

somnolent vision, then she was sitting down on the bed in the far corner. For some time Mrs. Tandy remained without moving, her hands on her knees, her head thrown back, her face was the blank of utter exhaustion but presently she frowned and her tongue appeared between her lips, then she nodded a couple of times and began taking off her clothes.

"Goodnight, Mrs. Tandy."

"What! What's that, Missus?"

"I wished you goodnight, Annie, and sleep as long as you can in the morning."

"Thank you, Missus. And are you sure you don't want me to help you get to bed Missus?"

"No, Annie, but thank you just the same."

"If you want anything you be sure and call me, Missus."

"Thank you, Annie, and goodnight again."

"Goodnight, Missus."

Mrs. Tandy put her clothes carefully over a chair and then at last stretched out on the narrow cot, she pulled up the thin blankets and muttered to herself, "The Missus'll have to holler loud enough to wake up the dead, before old Annie Tandy'll hear it, or heed."

Mrs. Albany slept. She sat in the shining metal chair fast asleep in the focus of light. Her head drooped forward, her shoulders hunched, and the shawls hung winglike to the floor. Her mouth that had been ever so fatally quick to emit the spate of bitter words at last was silenced, slack and open, those eyes that had looked so fitfully and astigmatically at the bits and fragments of her life had shut and visioned merely the amorphous closed in dream that deepened gradually into the heavy blankness of total sleep, nerveless and mindless, deathly slumber beyond the recall of fear or circumstance.

Sleep and nothing as the hours passed and day came, a dim, uncertain morning wrapped in swirling mists, but in this room with its drawn shades and dozens of lighted lamps neither day nor night could penetrate, sleep and suspended hours were all.

Yet one by one the dogs awakened, they lay on the floor with pricked up ears and sharp eyes on their mistress. Shep, the biggest of the police dogs stretched and yawned with a little yelp, and then sat back on her haunches, her head cocked, her pink tongue lolling over her sharp, wolfish teeth.

Mrs. Albany moved a little in her sleep and Shep trotted up to her and thrust her nose under the clenched hands. Automatically the woman began to stroke the dog's wide, flat head, then an expression of fatuous pleasure spread over her thin features, she scratchingly caressed the ears, leaning down snuggled her face against the furry shoulder, "Sheppy, Sheppy, Sheppy," she murmured.

In a moment, not to be outdone, Spot hurried up and nudged her way in beside her sister. Mrs. Albany let the dogs nuzzle her face whispering little "oh oh's" as the cold tips of their noses touched her cheeks. Then she called out quietly, "Here Pinkie, come here to me, Pinkie!" But the white dog remained aloof sitting on the floor across the room.

"Come here, Pinkie girl." The dog wagged her tail but still would not come.

All the depressions of her mornings came on her then and the stiffness and the pain, this time the more cruel for all that had passed that night.

"Pinkie, here Pinkie, come here, come here!" The voice rose in an anguished wail, "Pinkie, Pinkie, come here I say!"

"Come here this minute!" Mrs. Albany banged her hand down on the arm of the chair. The two police dogs excitedly jumped up, putting their front paws on her lap. "There's a good girl, Spot, Sheppy Love!"

Pinkie at last drew closer, she stood a little apart from the others, her head raised, her eyes on her mistress. "So, you white devil, you decided to come!" Mrs. Albany snatched up her cane from beside her chair and viciously cut at the dog with it. Pinkie jumped backwards, but not quickly enough, she caught the blow glanc-

ingly on the shoulder, it sent her off balance, somersaulting backwards, she yelped piteously.

The two other dogs went for her, but at that moment there was a knocking on the door and all three of them dashed towards the sound barking furiously.

"Mrs. Tandy, Mrs. Tandy!" the woman shrieked.

"Yes, Missus. Coming Missus!"

"Mrs. Tandy, he has come, he's knocking on the door, come quickly, he's at the door, Oh my God, help me, help me, Mrs. Tandy!"

"I'm right here, Missus, don't you worry, Missus."

As fast as she could, Mrs. Tandy was pulling on her dress, it got twisted going over her head, she jerked it around straight, grunted and sighed as she stooped over looking for the woollen stockings that had dropped off the chair, drew them on over the great, misshapen feet. Where's the pin that holds the front of me together? Somewheres here on one of the tables. There it is on the window sill. And my sweater? It's colder this time of morning than the rear end of a polar bear who's setting on an iceberg. "Just a minute, Missus, and I'll be with you!"

The dogs barked and the woman yelled, "Did you take my pistol, Annie? I can't find my pistol."

"Just a minute, Missus, I'm coming."

"Annie, Annie, the preparations weren't any use, but I am ready. Open the door, Annie because I am ready. I am ready, do you hear!"

"Yes, Missus, I'll open the door, Missus."

"Open the door, Annie, open it quick."

"Yes, Missus. Get out of my way there, Spot, Shep, you Pinkie, get out of my way, you wild Indians, so's I can open the door."

"Annie, I'm ready."

"There now, there, Missus, there, I got it open."

The air rushed in, and daylight grey and dazzling, browning the lamps within, and the sound of the sea, the smell of salt and damp, a figure stood in the opening, thin and tall with one hand

raised as if to knock once more, the wind whipped at her coat and pale hair and the dogs surged up around her. She reached out her arms, not against these leaping, demented creatures, but prayerfully, supplicating. The mixed light from within and without fell upon her face. She stepped lightly over the threshold and stopped.

"Mother," she said in a clear, strong voice, "Mother, I've come home."

Chapter 6

DISSY had gone first into the diner to ask the way to her mother's though presently she remembered that she was to meet the bus driver there. When she went in there was one other customer, a man sitting on a stool in the corner eating pea soup, so hunched over it that he hardly had to move the spoon from the bowl to his lips. He looked at Dissy and straightened up somewhat.

The man behind the counter was a short, stout man who was almost all chest and arms, he had a wide, sardonic smile that almost never left his face. He smoked constantly, leaving the cigarette always between his lips and one eye was screwed up from winking at smoke. His friends without much imagination called him Steamboat.

"Do you know Mrs. Albany who lives here?" Dissy asked him abruptly.

"Nope." He folded his arms and he grinned and he squinted at her and he decided she looked like a sweet piece. He wanted to be nice to her but he had a sense of humour that had to be assuaged at all cost so he called out to the man eating pea soup, "Hey, Bixby, dya know a Mrs. Salt Lake City who lives here?"

"Nope," said Bixby but he entered into the spirit of it between slurps of soup, "but I used to know a Mrs. Trenton, N.J."

Dissy was smiling timidly so Steamboat rattled off how it would be different if it were Miss Atlantic City or Miss Miami Beach, and Bixby allowed that it would be, but finally Steamboat said, seriously, "Bixby where does Mrs. Albany live, down the beach a ways, isn't it?"

"Sure there's an old biddy of that name, lives in one of those

crazy houses, used to be a restaurant or something, the Kaffee Klatch Kafe or something looks like a coffee pot."

"That's the one that Jack Tandy's ma works for."

"That's it. She's got a million dogs in there and a parrot or something. She's got all the furniture in the world too, I understand. Fell down and broke her hip a couple a years ago and has been in a wheelchair ever since, Jack says his ma says. Me, I wouldn't know, she's not my type."

"In other words even if she's crazy as a coot she isn't crazy enough to take you on."

"That's right."

Dissy looked nervously down at her hands. It wasn't a very nice way for them to talk about her mother and she felt embarrassed thinking that they would be embarrassed if they had known it was her mother.

"Okay, sister, you can't miss it. When you get out of here you turn right and keep going till you get to the boardwalk and then you turn right again and keep going all the way out the boardwalk till it ends and straight on up the beach till you get to this place. Like Bixby says, it looks like a coffee pot."

Dissy raised her eyes and gave him a long, troubled, bewildered look. "I'm not your sister," she said at last.

"Wha-what!"

"I had a sister but she died. And I have a brother whom I haven't seen for a long time. He ran away when my sister died." She looked so serious that Steamboat decided not to press the matter.

"Gee, that's too bad," he said lightly.

"S'long, Steamboat." The man had risen and gone to the door.

"S'long, Bix. Hi Killer."

The bus driver was just entering, he stretched and peeked over Bixby to see if Dissy were still waiting for him. Her manner was all he could have wished for, she gave him a chilly, touch-me-not stare and then looked back at the counterman. Actually, she was merely trying to remember the directions for getting to her mother's.

"Be with ya in a minute, Killer."

"Okay, okay." Davidson shoved his cap back on his head, lighted a cigarette, looked up at the ceiling and swung his feet in what he thought was a dashing fashion. Dissy had turned out to be much prettier than he had thought.

"I'm taking care of the lady."

"Okay, okay."

"I'll be withya when I finish taking care of the lady."

"Okay, okay."

Steamboat carefully wiped up the counter in front of Dissy and moved the salt and pepper and bottle of ketchup and sugar and napkin server to within her reach. "Wouldja like to look at the menu or something?"

"Yes, thank you."

He handed her a rather spattered, printed card. "Look, there's a lotta things on there that we don't have, but you just pick something and I'll tell you if we have it or not. Okay?"

"Yes?"

"Or do you want that I should tell ya first what we don't have none of so you'll know what not to pick?"

"Well?"

"I mean sometimes if you see something on the menu there, it'll seem like the thing you want most in the world, only if you knew that we didn't have it you wouldn't want it anyways, I mean you wouldn't be disappointed. Sometimes I think we ought to scratch things off there that we don't have, only I think it looks kinda sloppy with things all scratchin' off and sometimes we do have them, if you know what I mean."

Dissy nodded, completely bewildered.

"I mean we have most the ordinary things. You don't need to worry if you just want something usual. It's the things like that lobster salad sandwich there, you know. We don't get much call for things like that."

"Oh."

"What'sa idea, Steamboat, trying to mix her up?"

"She aint no chowder-head like you to get mixed up. You know what I mean, doncha, sister."

Dissy gave him a long, dreamy look. "You know before when I told you about my brother, I meant to tell you he was my half brother. I never knew him very well. I'm sorry now."

The bus driver craned his neck uneasily. It was all right for Dissy to mark time with Steamboat while she waited to be picked up, but she didn't have to tell him the story of her life.

"So many things that you regret, you have no idea of at the time," she continued. "If only we could do things over again, knowing earlier what we learn later. But it is too late. It's always too late to make amends." Then she smiled. "One cannot mend the past, but we still have the future—there are days and days to come that we can make beautiful. Once we've learned our lesson we can spend the rest of our lives doing good."

"Uh—yes," said Steamboat.

The bus driver moved himself down the counter towards her leap-frogging over the high stools with marvellous swiftness and agility. Dissy turned to him with what he was afraid was recognition, then she laughed merrily.

"Oh, I think it's wonderful how you get over all those stools."

"It's all in knowing how," he allowed modestly.

"I could never learn."

"Aw, sure ya could." He looked around the empty room with a conquering hero's air. But like lots of young men he couldn't bring himself to talk to the girl directly.

"How's about getting the lady a cuppa coffee?"

"How'm I supposed to know she wants a cuppa coffee?"

"Sure, she wants a cuppa coffee. What'd she come in for else? Think she wants to talk to a big lummoX like you?"

"She was talking to me awright before you came hornin' in. We was talking philosophical about life and doing good, and you have to come along and say all she wants to do is feed her face."

"And a person'd need a whole gallon of coffee to keep awake listening to you shoot the air."

"Says you!"

"Sure I says so."

Through all this Dissy was looking back and forth from one to the other with rising alarm and distress. "Please, please," she broke in finally, "I don't need a cup of coffee."

"See, Mac, the lady don't want a cup of coffee. You heard her."

"She said she didn't *need* a cuppa coffee. Of course she *wants* a cuppa coffee, but she's not gonna go down on her knees to get it and put up with alla crap you gotta hand out before ya ever think of giving it to her. Nobody needs a cuppa coffee that bad unless they're dying or something. And besides whatta ya think you're in the business for to just give coffee to a person who's gonna die if you don't, or can a person who just plain wants a cuppa coffee get it once in a while. For Chrissake, if I had to stop everybody who tries to get a ride on my bus and say, 'Mister, do you just wanta go or will all bejesus hell break out if you don't go where you gotta go because if you don't gotta go where you're going you don't get to go.' Ol v. Make it snappy now, a cuppa coffee for the lady and me."

"You mean one for both of ya or one for each of ya."

"Step on it, you know what I mean and I ain't got all night."

"Oh, I thought ya had all night."

"All night! Jesus Christ. Those bus lines inspector people they think a fellow is made outa iron all over or something. If ya stop for a minute for you know what, they come down on your head like a ton of you know what."

"Do you want it light or dark, mister?"

"Dark for me, how do you want it, kid?"

"I!" Dissy was startled. The eyes that stared at him were wide and frightened, the wild look of a tender forest creature, trapped and doomed. Then he saw that her whole face had tensed, the lips were pressed tightly together, the brow was furrowed and frowning and at the temple a little knotted blue vein stood out.

More gently he asked, "Would you like cream in your coffee or do you want it black?"

'Oh, I don't care at all!' she said passionately.

Steamboat brought the two coffees and a small container of cream.

"Would you like a sandwich or something?"

"I don't know." She looked distressfully away but not before he saw that her eyes had filled with tears.

He took her hand. "What's a matter, baby, I'm paying for it and everything."

"It's just . . . I don't want you to fight with each other!" she answered brokenly.

"Honey, we weren't fighting. Honest to gosh, we were just kiddin' around. It don't mean a thing, does it, Steamboat?"

"Heck no, lady. Mac here, he's a real jokey boy. Don't never take him serious, and me, I'm not never serious either." The two men looked very crestfallen and as sincere as they knew how, pleading with her. Now she smiled again, that lovely April look of a child who's received a favour instead of a reproof. "I didn't know," she said humbly, "I don't think I have a sense of humour at all."

"That's all right, honey, I have a terrible sense of humour. I've got the unfunniest sense of humour in the whole world," said the bus driver emphatically.

"And me, my sense of humour is worst than his," said Steamboat, "Why lady, my sense of humour is so grim that folks'd rather jump in the ocean and drown first before listening to me make a joke. It'd be a thousand times better not to have any sense of humour at all than the kind of a sense of humour I got."

"You see," said Dissy, "there used to be those terrible quarrels. Maybe it was all in fun, but I never knew. I never knew. And they said terrible things and Father went away and I never saw him after. My father said to me, 'We don't know our crimes until it is too late' and then he went away. And I loved him so much and I never saw him again."

She was speaking very quickly and her face had clouded up

again, with one hand she nervously whirled the coffee cup around and around in its saucer.

"I'll tell you what," said the bus driver finally, "Let's have a ham sandwich. How'd you like that?"

"I don't know."

"Look, I'm payin' for it so's you don't have to worry."

"It's on the house, so you don't neither of you have to worry."

"Oh you're nice, you're both very nice. Yes, I'd like a sandwich." A brilliant smile transfigured her thin, strained face, it was as though a rare and lovely light played upon it, at once speaking and ineffable, fantastic gratitude for so small a favour.

The two men would meet later. "Do ya remember?" "Yeah, I remember." "It was funny sorta." "Yeah, I know what ya mean, funny." "Funny that she was crazy in the head." "Yeah, like it's the rest of us instead of her. That's what I meant, funny." "Yeah, me too, I meant funny like that." As it was they stared at her embarrassed, but afraid to move and break the spell but at last Steamboat sidled away, and never taking his eyes off the girl, expertly went to work putting together a sandwich. Four or five slices of ham and cheese, mayonnaise, butter, mustard and relish, a couple of leaves of lettuce. "This here is the genuine, real McCoy, extra-special, super-duper delux Steamboat McInnis Appetite Stopper Sandwich," he said putting it down in front of her. "And," he added, "I'm making one for Killer Davidson here and one for me."

Dissy discovered she was ravenously hungry, she had gone without supper, of course, and lunches at Sunnyside were slim affairs at best, also she never ate with any appetite, though they make you eat everything, but this enormous sandwich, the man sized hunks of meat and cheese and bread seemed to her more delicious than anything she had ever had before in her life. Steamboat pulled a stool over behind the counter and the three of them ate in complete silence, occasionally exchanging full mouthed smiles.

But it was an easy, companionable quietness that had fallen

upon them, just so are old friends. The room was a little lighted island in the night, a fixed star in the wandering darkness and in time—the big, frank-faced clock on the wall measured it and ticked it off with little electrical jerks of the minute hand—this was an island, differing in quality and structure from the ocean that lay around it, experience and future at low tide, the waves quiet and far off.

They had more coffee all around and the bus driver was saying, "Steamboat, that's the finest sandwich I ever et, honest to Christ."

"It was delicious," Dissy agreed.

"Well, the genuine, real McCoy extra-special super-duper deluxe Steamboat McInnis Appetite Stopper Sandwich is supposed to be something special, ye know."

But the bus driver was already thinking that in a few minutes more he had to go off down the road carrying anonymous people in the anonymous night, and Steamboat was thinking of those, hardly less strange though sometimes he knew their names and faces, who would be drifting in, odd ones who stay up all night from work or inclination, indifferently eating and paying and going away. Dissy was thinking about her mother.

Someone was walking up the sidewalk, his feet crunched on the gritty sand that overlaid the pavement, the three of them looked toward the door as though the footsteps were a signal.

They waited for the one outside hesitated at the door; they could hear his hand on the latch, but still he did not enter, indeed after a few moments they heard him walk away, but only a few steps, then he returned and at last threw open the door, stood there dramatically an instant, his arms raised, his feet apart, a brilliant, striped coat opening fanlike behind him.

"Hup, by God, it's Marty Noman!" Steamboat exclaimed ironically.

"Yup, it's me."

"Hy," said the bus driver who had seen him before.

That queer, grizzled child-man in the pointed hat surveyed them all, sly and impudently merry. In his hand he held an enor-

mous flashlight, and after a moment he turned it to his face and pressed it on.

"It makes me look funny, don't it?"

"Sure does, Marty," said Steamboat.

"You bet," from the bus driver.

Suddenly he turned the beam on Dissy, it made a dull little gleam under the fluorescent lighting. "I seen you before."

"No," said Dissy. She was smiling gravely, "I've never been here before."

"Mebbe not, then." He wagged his head which reminded him of his hat. He reached up and undid the ribbon that secured it. "Seein' as there's ladies present, I'll take it off." He grinned roguishly at the bus driver who had never thought of taking off his cap.

"Okay," Steamboat put in quickly. "What'll you have?"

"Don't rush me, don't rush me," the other said fussily. He picked his way to the counter with the air of a cat walking on a wet ground, then he hesitated over deciding which of the several stools to take, and when he at last sat down, he did so carefully, with his coat hanging free over the back of the stool. "Don't pay me no mind, now," he tried to reassure the bus driver.

"Don't worry, I don't."

"I just wanted to be sure you weren't worried."

"I ain't, I tell you."

Marty took the menu and studied it for a long time. Finally he looked up to remark, "I wonder if there's any light down there inside of the earth where it's burnin' up all the time."

"Why don't you go down there and find out?" suggested Steamboat.

"Can't right now, mebbe later though. Do you guess that's where hell is?"

"There's all kinds of places where hell is," Dissy said suddenly.

Marty looked at her gravely, then he scratched the side of his nose. "Only, what I was thinking," he said presently, "is that hell

is a place where it's light inside but you can't see it because it's all covered up."

"Do you know my mother?" Dissy asked abruptly.

Marty looked her full in the face, the impudence and clownishness that had been there all the while vanished. His brown eyes softened, his lips turned down at the corners. "Yes, I know her, Miss."

"Aaaaw," said Steamboat, "he's pullin' your leg."

"Yeah, for Chrissake," the bus driver put in his two cents worth. "She just told you a minute ago that she'd never been here before, so how'n the heck do you think you know her fambly?"

"Do you know where she is?" Dissy asked.

"Yes."

"Will you go there with me?"

This time Marty turned away, he pretended to look out the window, he plucked at his coat, he shuffled his feet, he played with the flashlight; all of this exactly the actions of an evasive child, and still the question so lightly put, hung unanswered, somehow uncanny and weird. The scene was strange, Marty in his brilliant coat wriggling miserably on his stool, the other two men leaned tensely forward, Dissy sat straight, her hands clenching the empty purse in her lap, her face frozen and white, saying, "You see, I don't know the way very well. I've never been here before, but I've come . . . I came to see her. Please, won't you go there with me?"

"I'd rather not, Miss," Marty answered finally in a low voice.

Steamboat suddenly furious advanced on him. "You get outta here, hear! You get outta here this minute. I don't ever wanna see you come back. Now go on, git!"

Marty scrambled to his feet and gathered up his flashlight and his hat, instantly, with the scurrying quickness of an animal, and fled to the door.

"No!" Dissy cried out.

"Miss, he don't know nothing, he's stringing you along. I know him, he's a dirty, little rat."

"No!" Dissy cried again, "He knows."

Marty stopped at the door and turned. "Miss," he said urgently, "Don't go and see her, go back where you came from, or any place, only don't go see that one. She's . . . well you wouldn't want to see her."

Dissy slipped off her stool and ran towards him her arms outstretched. "Please . . . please don't go."

Marty grinned and glanced at Steamboat. "I gotta go, Miss. Thanks just the same. Seems I ain't wanted around here. I got the feeling I sorta wasn't wanted, you know."

"You can stay," said Steamboat. He sighed heavily.

"He said you can stay."

Marty made a production number of whether he left or didn't, but of course, at last he let himself be persuaded to remain. The bus driver, mindful of the clock, did have to go, he said, so long all the way round, then he looked once more at the girl, "Come outside with me a minute, will ya."

He led her a few steps up the street and into a recessed door, looked back to make sure the ever snooping Marty had not followed. She stood quite close to him with her face tipped up to his, he could hardly see her features in the dim light, but he remembered her soft loveliness so clearly that it almost seemed to him that he could make out at least those shining eyes and tenderly parted lips.

But he pulled himself up short, speaking gruffly almost, "Look, kid, you don't wanna go back with me on the bus? I can make it all right."

"No, no thank you."

"Well, I wisht you would, but since this is where you wanted to come I figured probly you'd aim to stay. Only look, you stick with Steamboat, hear, he knows how to treat a lady. That other one, that Marty, he's balmy as a coot, his mother dropped him or something. He'll say anything to hear hisself talk, so don't you listen to him, hear!"

"Yes."

"But Steamboat, he's awright. He's got a wife and sisters and a mother and everything, and one of them could put you up. And here," he held out his hand and slipped her two five dollar bills folded over and over again to the size of a postage stamp.

"What is it?"

"It's something to help you get along. Money, you know, you need it, and you can pay me back sometime if ya want."

"Oh, I don't want it."

"Sure, you take it."

"No, please."

"Look, kid, it's been a treat knowing ya, and maybe I'll see ya around again. And I'd feel better knowing you had something. Why I'd worry myself sick all the way back to town, have an accident maybe from worryin', so ya keep it, huh?"

"Well, thank you very much."

Gee, she's so sweet and pretty, he was thinking. He hesitated. It seemed so funny standing in a dark doorway like this with a girl and not kissing her a little, just one little, it seemed more friendly sorta.

"Another thing . . ." he said haltingly. "They call me Killer Davidson 'cause I drive that awful bus, only I never killed nothing. My real name's Henry."

"My name's Dissy. Dissy Albany."

"That's a real pretty name. Dissy, unusual and all. Well, so long, Dissy."

"Goodbye, and thank you so much for everything."

"Oh Dissy . . . well, see ya round."

"Yes, I hope I'll see you soon."

"Look, Dissy, I'll walk you back to the diner." He took her arm for the few steps, then at the door, "Well, Dissy, so long."

"Goodbye, Henry."

"Thanks, Dissy, goodbye."

He walked quickly away.

But she did not return to the diner. She waited in the doorway until the bus drove away, then she crossed the street and sat down

on the stone steps of the building opposite waiting for Marty to come out and go with her to her mother's.

Marty found her there fast asleep and curled up like an animal against the cold. He shone his light in her face and pulled her arm and then when she finally stirred, he trained the beam into his own face so she could see who he was and not be frightened.

Hyperbola of light illumined the pale jack-o-lantern features under the witch's hat, snaggle toothed grin, "Ha" (it sounded like that, probably "Hya," except to her it seemed he was saying "Ha"). "Ha, Miss. What are you doing here, Miss?"

"Oh!"

"Remember me, Miss. I saw you before. Inside there."

"Yes, I was waiting for you," she managed to say.

"Well, it's lucky I saw ya then. If I hadn't seen ya, ya coulda waited all night and it wouldn'ta done any good."

"Yes."

He sat down beside her. "Ya know, if I hadn't had this flashlight here I never would have seen ya. I woulda walked right by, only the beam picked ya out."

"It's a good flashlight."

"Yeah, it's a dandy, all right. Do you want to look at it?" He held it out to her. "See, lookit, if ya pus' this thing here you can flash her on and off and make Morse code."

"So you can."

"And this thing here, if ya turn it, you can make the beam bigger or littler."

"That's wonderful."

"And this hook here, if I can make her come out, that's for hanging her up on a nail if you wanna. There, there's that old hook out."

"Yes, there it is."

"You know what? This here flashlight was made in Hong Kong."

"I didn't know they made flashlights in Hong Kong."

"You wouldn't think they would, would you, Miss, only this

one says right on it, made in Hong Kong. By a Chinaman all that way off, it's sorta funny."

"Yes."

"It's clear on the other side of her, China is, on the other side of the ocean and the Chinamen all walk upside down."

"Yes."

Marty stretched out his arm. "You wouldn't think she'd have another side, the ocean, I mean, she's so wide, only she has another side even though you can't see it and on the other side there is Hong Kong and the Chinamen and they make flashlights."

She handed it back to him and they sat for a few minutes in silence, then he asked her slyly for a cigarette. She remembered that she had borrowed one from Bibi Martin in the movie house and she had never smoked it. It was still in her pocket, a little worse for wear, but she gave it to Marty.

"Thank you very much, Miss."

"Do you have a comb?"

"What?"

"Do you have a comb? To comb your hair with?"

"Maybe I have."

"I have one in my room, but I forgot to bring it with me and then I was going to buy one, only they were all so expensive and besides I had to run and catch the bus. Just the same, I wish I could borrow one because Mother is very particular about wanting me to look nice."

"I guess I have one somewheres here." He burrowed in his pockets and finally produced a piece of a comb about two and a half inches long, some of the teeth were missing but it could still be used. "Here, you can have it to keep, if you want."

"Oh, thank you, thank you so much."

"It ain't nothing, Miss. I always forget to use it myself."

"Would you mind not looking, please."

"What?"

"I mean, Mother says I should never comb my hair in front of people."

"Oh it's pretty dark here, Miss, I can't see."

"That's right, it's dark, I'd forgotten." Then she began to laugh. He laughed too.

When she had finished combing her hair she stood up and carefully brushed off her coat and smoothed her skirt. "I must go to Mother's now."

"Yes." He nodded his head a couple of times, the loose, waggly way of a marionette. "Yeah," still bobbing his head comically, he got to his feet and walked in a jaunty fashion over to her and took her arm. "I'd forgotten. Only we can't stay here all night, can we!"

"No, I have to go to Mother's."

"Nope, we can't." He dropped her arm and suddenly scurried away down the street.

Dissy, of course, never did get home that night, nor, however, did any harm befall her. She followed Marty and then she lost him and then she wandered around the dim, moonlit streets of the little town past rows of sleazy clapboard houses with sagging porches and lean-to additions, touched and transformed by the brilliant moonlight into a strange, dream village, following sometimes what she thought was Marty up a narrow way that led only to a dead end and a barking dog.

"I'm lost," she told the shadows quite cheerfully. "I've never been here before."

She turned back, the dog on the other side of the fence was barking his heart out. A sleepy voice upstairs yelled, "Shut up, for Chrissake, if you don't shut up I'll kick you in the teeth so hard you won't be able to bark for a week!"

"Poor doggie," she said, "I'll go away and you won't have to bark any more."

She made her way back to the main street. The lights of the diner were still on but she turned steadfastly in the opposite direc-

tion. In there they knew, they always knew, but they wouldn't tell her.

Everybody always knew, in a way, they always knew. Dr. Peter knew. He made a long face and wagged his head back and forth. He knew. And Miss Coles knew, and the people in dreams. Knowing. Only you yourself didn't know, everybody knew except you. You would have to keep quiet and pretend you knew. You would close your eyes and your mouth and stop up your ears in order not to know, and they pulled your hands away and shouted, we know, we know.

Please, oh please! she begged.

Dr. Winter was there. She pretended she was asleep. She pretended she had been bitten by a tsetse fly and she would never wake up. They stuck her with a needle. The tsetse flies were dressed up in white uniforms and wore little caps on their heads, but they had a million eyes, just like any other fly.

I am Dr. Peter, your friend. You know that.

I am asleep, I don't know Dr. Winters and I don't even own a green dress. They want me to wear a green dress, but it belongs to somebody else. I'm sorry to look this way but they make me wear other people's clothes. Mother says I should take care of myself so I look nice. David was stupid. I remember Mother said he was stupid so I pointed my finger at him and said, Stupid, Stupid. But he wanted to buy me some ice cream.

And it turns out that I am stupid. I don't know where to go. I am lost. They told me how to go but I don't remember what they said. If I find Marty he will show me where to go. The others won't, they know, but they won't tell me.

Dr. Peter knows and he will tell me. He says, I know how it is. When I open my eyes it turns out to be Dr. Peter. How do you know, I asked him. It's very simple, really, knowing.

It's simple for other people, but I am stupid. Mother always said I was stupid. I will cry in a minute or perhaps I am crying already. If they let go of my hands I could feel my face and see if the tears have come.

You are not stupid at all, and you must learn not to be afraid. I'm not afraid. Really, I'm not.

It's dark here, but I'm not afraid a bit.

I am afraid of the water.

There is the ocean and I am afraid. But the boardwalk is here and that is perfectly strong. I don't know how to swim so it's perfectly reasonable to be afraid of water. It's silly not to have learned how to swim. We used to live on the Sound but the water was so dirty. But the water is clean here. I wouldn't mind swimming in this water.

Then there were some people walking up the boardwalk. There was a man and a woman. They could tell her how to go. But they might take her back to the diner where everybody wanted her to stay and not go to see her mother. She was supposed to go see Steamboat and his mother and his wife and his sister. They were all very good people, but they didn't understand how she had to go and see her mother. They would say, you better go and see Dr. Peter just the way Miss Coles did. Miss Coles had funny lips, very narrow and pursed up and she had a little moustache, very thin, hardly more than eyelashes on her upper lip which made it funny when she said you ought to go and see Dr. Peter, dear.

Dissy ran down the steps to the sand and crept under the boardwalk. But before she went she saw that the man was carrying a heavy bundle over his shoulder. He walked very slowly as though he was tired and the woman who was with him walked slowly too.

She could hear them talking when they walked on the boardwalk over her. She was under them and she lifted up her head listening to what they were saying.

"Well, it beats me, how Ma puts up with that old woman," the man said.

"Yeah, she puts up with plenty, all right."

"She hadn't ought to stay there."

"No, not more'n just tonight."

"I'm gonna put my foot down, so I will."

"We'll get ahold of that fellow tomorrow."

"Yeah, the one she was talking about going to murder her, only he's flesh and blood to her so he oughtta keep care of her."

"I didn't know he was flesh and blood."

"Sure, Ma says he's flesh and blood to her, sorta. Anyways enough so he can keep care of her. And the crazy one too that's wandering round loose all over."

"Funny, everything happening at once like."

"Allas do, though. But another night like this and I'm through."

"I'm through right now."

"Jeez, all that furniture. Jeez, it beats me for sure."

"The kid's through too."

"Christ, he weighs a ton."

"We'll get ahold of that fellow."

"Yeah . . . tomorrow."

"... oughta ..."

"Yeah, sure . . . only right ..."

"... see ..."

"I ..."

Dissy couldn't hear them any longer. She lay beneath the walk for quite a while but the water was coming in. It found a way over the beach and sank into the hollow places in the sand under the uprights. The others had gone away, it was all right if she stopped hiding.

She walked slowly along the boardwalk. In the distance it got narrower and narrower but at the end of it she saw her mother's face. With very stern eyes. It's because I was sick, Mother was so strict. But she wasn't mean and cruel, that was only in my mind which was sick. I imagined it, that's why she didn't answer my letters. Dr. Peter says he didn't think I wrote very nice letters and I didn't. I imagined so many things and I wrote in anger.

The path in the dunes was very soft. Her shoes kept filling with sand. And her heels sank in. She was so tired she could hardly lift her feet. She lifted them, one then the other but it took a great

Port, after that she would have to stop and stand on one foot while she emptied her shoes of sand.

Then she fell down. She had gone such a long way it seemed her just to lie there instead of going on.

"She was laying on the sand which was very cold and hard under her. Sand is soft if you sift it between your fingers or try to walk on it, but when you lie down it's hard, just like stone.

It's too bad.

"The old one, the old one."

"Oh, there you are Marty, I was looking everywhere for you."

He was stooping over her and she could see him just a black shadow in front of the stars.

"What did you say, Marty?"

"The old one here. She's black now."

"What?"

"Listen to her."

"I'm listening, Marty."

"It's for us, it's for all of us. We came outta her, she made us out of salt and wet, that's what we are, a little salt and a little wet, and we pretend to be so much."

"Yes, Marty, that's right, I'm listening."

"There really isn't another side. I was talking about the other side of her, but she'll all around us, it's not us around her. She's around the whole world and every place. She runs together everywhere. She's before and she's after all the time and everywhere running together."

"Yes, Marty, yes."

"So you needn't come here, ya see, ya see what I mean?"

"Yes, Marty."

"I mean we came outta her and she made us and she's all around and she's ours, and we don't belong to anybody excepten her."

"Yes, oh yes."

"So you can come away now."

"Yes."

"And it's lucky I found you."

"I was following, but you went away too fast."

"I didn't mean to. You come with me now."

"Yes, I'll come with you."

"I saw you too, but that time you were running."

"I was running to my mother's. I never found her though."

"No."

"Only here's the mailbox. Right here in the road, you can read the letters in the moonlight."

"A-L-B-A-N-Y—. That's what I can read."

"It's Mrs. Jessica Albany, really. I've written Mother so many letters."

"I knew it was Albany. I heard the radio, I mean."

"What?"

"Old Steamboat's radio broke. I wouldn't tell though."

"Is that the house there?"

"Yes, Miss, that's the house."

"It's dark."

"Yes."

"Nobody's there, she's gone away."

"It's dark all right."

"Nobody's there, nobody's there."

"You come with me."

"Where?"

"Come."

"Yes."

"Come."

"Yes, yes, I'm coming."

"Come."

"Don't run away again."

"No, Miss, I won't."

"Please."

He led her away. She had been lying in a little hollow underneath the mailbox post. The shadowy, dark build-
dunes rose behind them but the two slipped quietly away.
took her back to the town and then through a gate of

to the amusement park. He found a shelter in the carousel and covered her up with the canvas he took off the wooden horses. "You can sleep here," he said.

"Yes."

"The canvas will keep you warm."

"I'm warm."

They heard some voices, some people talking. "Just a minute, Miss. I'll come back, don't you worry. Just lie still."

He went away. She watched him go across a wide open space in the moonlight, then he turned on his light. Two people went up to him and he led them away. She could see the three figures and the moon and the little yellow beam of the flashlight.

Then he came back.

"Miss, you see the horse there who's prancing on his hind legs and his mane's flowing out behind?"

"Yes."

"That one over there. I'm sleeping beside him, so's I'm here if you worry."

"Yes, Marty."

Then she called out, "I'll go there in the morning."

"Yes, Miss. That's right, go there in the morning."

Just as she was going to sleep she remembered the money that the bus driver had given her. She would give it to her mother. When her mother would know that she wasn't sick any more and that she wasn't penniless.

"I'll go there."

"Yes."

"Goodnight, Marty."

"Goodnight, Miss. Sleep . . ."

"Yes . . . I am . . . sleep . . . in the morning . . ."

Chapter 7

BELINDA's party. Was a success according to Belinda. Eustace Widd thought so too. He said heavily, "Belinda, I don't know when I've enjoyed myself so thoroughly." He looked around mournfully, it was his wont, everybody knew and this assurance oozed out of him at approximately fifteen minute intervals all evening long. He meant it too. When he wasn't enjoying himself, he would tell people, "I just came because Sandra wanted to. Myself, I don't think you ever meet anyone interesting at parties." He believed in being honest and above board in matters of social intercourse.

The other people in their various ways indicated that they too were having a good time. Billie Kerne, a slender, platinum blonde who tried to accentuate her resemblance to Bette Davis, would follow Belinda out into the kitchen and tell her, "Gee, Belinda, you give the best parties of any girl I know. And I like your Ed Miller. I think he's real cute." Then she'd pull her girdle down.

Phil Johnson vigorously made himself the life of the party, bounced around like a big beach ball, Rudy Parkinson, a silent Sam, sat happily on the floor, his knees crossed Hindu fashion, drank more than was good for him and had a "deep" conversation with Sandra Widd.

Phoebe Buttersworth had been asked after all. She was a plain, dull looking girl who gave the impression of being as solid and permanent as an Egyptian monument. She occupied one chair the entire evening. Her flat eyebrows drew themselves together when she talked and she was very happy because she had been invited.

Eddie Nace and Tina Grosz and Norma Leach and Norma's be

friend, a tattooed sailor who called himself Dumbo, formed a gay little foursome. Belinda looked over her guests with quiet, maternal satisfaction. She had changed into dark blue corduroy slacks and a fancy evening blouse set off with a red sash twisted around her middle. Miller thought dispassionately that she looked rather pretty, an idea that coalesced like light on the surface of a soap bubble, vanishing in an instant as the nightmarish present dissolved into a nightmarish past. He felt benumbed as if by an intolerable pain, looking around at the others with a large indulgence which alternated with periods of dizzying impatience as one who suffers from an actual physical hurt travels a pendulum from a state that rises above and beyond the agony to one completely given over and occupied by it.

A night of illness is without end or beginning, the steady hours are denatured by the sense; a second is illuminated and persists for agonising minutes, then if the weighted hand of the clock sweeps a quarter circle we offer up thanks to a merciful God; Miller mumbled to himself, party, party, party and he thought of his little sister, and he thought of obligation and necessity, he found himself walking up and down cheerfully shouting, "It's my constitutional. I'm taking my constitutional," to Tina Grosz whose lovely face impinged laughingly upon his consciousness.

He stopped in front of Eustace Widd who told him earnestly, "I'm a lifelong Democrat but I voted for Ike in fifty-two. I believed that it was time for a change."

"Quite right, quite right," distractedly.

"The American people have a right to have a change. I was going to vote for Dewey in forty-eight because I thought we needed a change then, but when it came right down to it I couldn't bring myself to vote for somebody who wouldn't say where he stood."

"No indeedy."

"The American people have a right to know where a man stands before they vote for him."

Eustace Widd was turning grey but just the same he looked younger than he was. He had soft brown eyes that were magnified to twice their size by his heavy, steel-rimmed glasses. He placed his hand like a Napoleon on his diaphragm and continued, "I'm very glad that I voted for Truman, though I'm not one of these Roosevelt Democrats, believe me. Why the very first man I voted for was Cox, James M. Cox, and then I voted for Davis, John W. Davis, and then I voted for Alfred E. Smith. After that I had to vote for Roosevelt all the time and as I say I wasn't going to vote for Truman but I did."

The soft, brown orbs seemed to bumble against his glasses like fish in an aquarium, revealed him as a fumbling, doubt ridden man. "If you ask me," he was stating distinctly—he had a speech mannerism that made it seem when he talked as though he were at the same time trying to dislodge a fish bone from between his square, large, white teeth, "If you ask me," he said again, "Dewey would have turned out to be just another Roosevelt. Not that the American people would have stood for it."

The room was mercilessly hot and filled with cigarette smoke. To make things real gay Belinda had switched on the radio and it continued unheeded producing some music, some talk and some static; a disconsolate philodendron hung down from a shelf over it trembling slightly.

Sandra Widd suddenly raised her voice to say, "Nobody will ever love me as much as I love myself."

She was a lovely, luscious woman, much younger than her husband. She had been to France for a year "studying" and returned to speak her native tongue with a French accent. She had a really impressive amount of hair, thick and curly and very long, dyed a dark, lustreless red. She had a creamy, dark complexion, far apart green eyes and heavy red lips set off with little dimples that marked her cheeks with evocative smiles even when she was trying to be most serious. Her chassis in a revealingly cut black silk blouse and a tight, scarlet skirt was practically perfect.

Now she looked around the room lazily and repeated, "I really

mean it, nobody can ever possibly love me as much as I do myself." She patted her lovely bosom as she spoke.

"It's fascism pure and simple," said Mr. Widd earnestly, "Asking you to take a pig in a poke so to speak. And that's not for the American people, nosiree."

Belinda touched Miller's arm, she had a pitcher full of cocktails. "Fill 'er up?" she said in a jolly way. The martinis, he thought dispassionately, have too much vermouth in them. But Belinda was gone again and Eustace Widd was saying, "The American people aren't sheep."

"Lamby pie," said Sandra catching sight of Belinda and the refreshments.

As gracefully as he could, Miller led Eustace across the room. Belinda twined her free arm through his. "Feeling any better?" she asked.

Good Christ! Better, better, better. Frantic flutterings inside his caged mind, better, better, better, thinking, in one sense it is infinitely worse. Dissy's letter. Worse. She in her way, I in mine. Better. What one strives for, an infinite ascent, one faints below and they bend over you, what, haven't you yet attained the heights! Till at last hope fails, better, better, better, infinitely blurred and faint, ultimately to cease and vanish. Belinda: "Feeling any better?" We are grateful for it.

"Yeah, baby, yeah." He tosses back his head downing the drink and it makes a little wet mustache on his lips. He holds out his glass, "Fill 'er up."

But Belinda had turned away and was bending over Sandra whispering something into her ear. The perfect hostess, a whisper for every guest. He squirmed and out of the corner of his eye saw Eustace Widd open his mouth a little to let out another thoughtlet about the American People.

"America . . ." he started to say, but Miller said cheerily to Phoebe Buttersworth who sat so ponderously in her chair, "Well whatdya know?"

Phoebe Buttersworth had only two facial expressions, one when

she smiled and drew her eyebrows together, the second when her face relaxed. "What?" she asked, arranging her face into the first expression.

"Are you any relation to Herbert Buttersworth?"

It seemed at the time the sort of conversation that would appeal to such a girl and indeed it did. She wanted to know whether Herbert Buttersworth came from Cleveland, and when he said he didn't know, she told him there were a number of Buttersworths in Cleveland but that they were not related to her.

Belinda told Eustace Widd that she thought he'd like to read *The Mature Mind*.

Sandra was telling Rudy Parkinson that alone we come into the world and alone we shall depart therefrom. "And we spend our whole lives," she said passionately, "in a world we never made."

"Hear ye, hear ye!" But Phoebe thought he was talking to her. "Oh," she said with pleasure. "You mean that Herbert Buttersworth came from Chicago. If he did then he might be one of our cousins."

He decided against telling her that he'd just made up Herbert Buttersworth in his head. And who knows perhaps I made up Mrs. Albany in my head with her "Young man, young man!" And all the rest, figments of my particularly nasty imagination.

Belinda where are you, won't you come and ask me whether I'm feeling any better?

Let's go to the fair.

Belinda had gone out to the kitchen for more drinks. For more vermouth merely, he thought sourly.

"One branch of the family," Phoebe was saying, "did go to Illinois."

Billie Kern who thought nobody was looking was carefully and thoroughly pulling down her girdle. It was the first time she'd worn it and it was driving her crazy. Then Eddie Nace strolled over to her with, "Lemme help you, baby."

"The worst thing," said the beautiful Sandra, "is meeting *yourself*. Meeting yourself face to face."

Miller gently excused himself from Phoebe and drifted out to the kitchen. Belinda was there larking around the ice trays.

"Oh Eddy," she said, "the party's being a success."

"Yeah baby, yeah."

"And everybody thinks you're wonderful. And they're so impressed that you're a writer."

"Yeah, baby. Easy on the vermou**th**."

"Oh this time of night," she said confidently, "nobody knows the difference."

But why the hell argue with her. "Belinda, you're beautiful."

"Oh sure, keed."

"I mean it. And I love you more than I love anybody in the world."

"Not here," she said pouting.

"I love you the bestest and the mostest of everybody."

He managed to embrace her. Better, better, better, in his mind, tasting salt, no, milk rather, her lips for some reason tasted to him of milk, one carries the mother-substitute notion a little far, her body felt very bony and small in his arms, other differences from Jeanne also, why think of Jeanne at this point, except that his face, his lips, the insides of his arms, his chest, his belly and his balls, recollected her, needs must, treasure remembrance.

"Most in the world, baby," he said thickly, "Isn't that good!"

As he wiped the lipstick off himself he thought, "God, it's all so stupid." Stupid, stupid, stupid. He filled up his glass with straight gin and returned to the company.

Belinda looked at him with a proprietary air, just like we had had it, or something. Stupid, stupid, stupid. And Sandra was saying, "The worst thing of all is meeting yourself face to face and finding that *there is no one there at all*."

"You said it!" Miller broke out savagely.

"What?"

Eddie Nace and Tina Grosz and Norma Leach and the tattooed sailor began to sing. They made a deafening racket.

"What?"

"I said you said it."

"Oh."

And Jessica Albany's hair used to be just as thick as that. Growing curling out of her forehead and at the temples, manelike hair, rich and luxuriant, sweeping back and rippling down, longer than this, masses of hair tumbling down her back. She sat at the dressing table, French Empire with solid gold handles and a silver backed mirror, the mirror reflected the whole room, but the room was drowning in hair, she sat there before the mirror, her neck arched and the tremendous hair, surely there wasn't enough space on that little head for each hair to have a root, surely there wasn't enough strength in that little, slender neck to hold itself erect, was that the secret of her charm, the beauty and the frail structure that seemed too little and small to support its weight.

Behind Jessica Albany stood the half grown girl, so pale and skinny, unloved, badly dressed in a sweater and skirt that were too small for her, she raised her arm listlessly brushing the beautiful hair.

David squatted on the floor looking up.

Remembering later, it was a rum business how she always managed to make me come in there when she had her hair down. I was too young to know what it was all about, and Maidie even though she was older was a girl and presumably wouldn't be able to know either.

Not knowing but feeling hot and uneasy, just the same, while Jessica Albany laughed in an odd way and bent forward till her fragrant hair touched his face. He drew back. Maidie would be leaning forward still brushing. Her lips were tight together. That day she had strained her arm, it made her whole side ache, but she had no more than merely mentioned it.

"Well, Maidie, it's time you brushed my hair." Every day there was a time that Maidie brushed her hair, three hundred strokes.

"Mother, I hurt my arm."

"I'm sorry to hear it, Maidie, you can hold the brush in your other hand, surely."

Then, "Good heavens, Maidie, you're clumsy. Ow, you hurt me!" She struck out at Maidie. Obliquely, not hard enough to hurt, but ill-tempered and humiliating.

He sat on the low stool, so low down it was almost squatting on the floor to sit on it, looking upwards saw Maidie's face white and pinched and the eyes darkening. She changed the brush from one hand to the other and continued stroking it against the hair without breaking her rhythm, but now she winced each time, she never said a word.

Sometimes he pretended he wasn't there at all, that he was just imagining it or remembering it, sometimes he could do that by squunching up something inside his head as though he were deaf and at the same time look at something very hard with his eyes and shut off all the things that were happening. He was managing right then to shut himself up like that, like a clam would, it would be nice to be a clam and have a shell that you could just close up when things you didn't like were happening. He had found clams on the beach that were closed up so tight that nothing in the world would ever open them.

He wrinkled up his nose. There was some kind of perfume stuff that she used and he could smell it. He was remembering the way Maidie's face looked when she was brushing Her hair, that time her arm ached her so. Maidie licked her lips and then she pressed them together, sucking the red part in so it didn't show at all. He was looking at her and seeing it and pretending it was something that had already happened. Before. A long time ago. It wasn't happening any more, that is he pretended that after it didn't do any good to pretend that he was a clam.

That is all the time he was pretending he was a clam he really knew he wasn't and there wasn't any way to shut out those things that were happening. Only maybe he could think about something else in a minute so that would show that this was just re-

membering, instead of happening right now. You can remember bad things but they're not so bad then as when they happened, because at least they're not happening any more.

He was remembering that She was looking right into the mirror. Right into Her own eyes, he looked at the image and felt kind of funny inside, thinking in a minute She'll look at him and that was scary. He was more scared of having Her look at him than anything else She ever did to him. Even when She punished him and things, it wasn't so bad as the way She looked first. He'd never look at Her in the face back except that She'd make him. "Look at me, look at me, David. Look me in the eye." He would do it because he was scared not to, sick feeling then in his stomach and his eyes dazzled, an awful feeling. But She wasn't looking at him then, She was looking at Herself in the mirror.

All of a sudden She started to laugh. People call it laughing when you make a sound like that, broken sort of noise, sharp, and Her lips were turned up at the edges, going "hek, hek hek," a mean sort of noise really.

Going "hek, hek, hek," and Her head jiggling up and down sharply. The two children remained completely solemn faced and didn't look at Her; they didn't even look at each other. "Hek, hek, hek," rattled in Her throat, rattled in their ears. Maidie kept on brushing away, he kept sitting on the stool looking upwards, not looking at anything much, just his head was turned back and the open eyes pointed upwards, if he shut his eyes She'd start picking on him, so he kept them open as though he were looking up, not seeing anything special, hair mostly, brown hair with lights of yellow and red in it, ripply and curly, full of electricity from the brushing, going out to the brush, hair, seeing it, hearing "Hek, hek, hek," coming out of Her throat.

He'd lost track of how many times the brush had gone through the hair. Three hundred times every day it was supposed to be, sometimes though it was more, Maidie would have to keep on and on until She told her to stop. Sometimes it seemed that She'd never have enough of it.

Her hair made snapping electrical noises and of course there was the noise of the brush against it and the "hek, hek, hek," that She was making. But there wasn't another sound in the house.

Not in the whole house that he could hear. If there were another noise, the littlest noise in the world would do, he could listen to it, that would be as though his ear at least wasn't in this room any more, if there were a little noise, say from the kitchen and he could hear it, it would be like going down to the kitchen, out from this little boudoir room through the big bedroom and out in the hall and past the door to his own room and down the stairs and up the downstairs hall past the parlour and through the dining room and through the pantry and into the kitchen. If there were just the leastest sound it wouldn't take him a second to do all that.

But all he could hear was Her "hek, hek, hek," and the noise the brush made and the little electrical cracklings and snappings in the hair.

The house usually was quiet like that. That was one of the awful things about the house. Its quietness. Nobody was ever supposed to make any noise. You weren't allowed to forget, but anyway the minute you came in you didn't feel like making a sound. When he went outside he felt like making a terrible lot of noise, shouting and rattling sticks against iron fences and hitting garbage pails and barking at dogs to make them bark and every kind of noise he could imagine to make, but when he came in the house his spirits sank and he was as quiet as a mouse. Even the baby was quiet. They had a nurse named Nancy and she kept her quiet all right, and Maidie was quiet but she was a girl, of course, and the only person who ever made a noise was Father who sometimes made a little noise.

Father would open the front door and shout out, "Hello there, is anybody home?" and then he'd walk to the hall closet and make a perfectly ordinary noise with his footsteps, not tiptoe, that is. And when there were grownup parties at night there were sounds in the house then. But not in the daytime except that Hilda sometimes made a little noise in the kitchen. Only she wasn't there

now. It was as if the rest of the house didn't exist. As though all there was in the world was this little tiny room that was so hot and smelling of the perfume stuff and there were only three people in the world, Maidie standing there eternally brushing and brushing and her arm hurting and Her "hek, hek, hek," jiggling up and down in front of the mirror and himself trapped on the floor.

"All right," She said at last, "you can do my shoes now, David."

Theoretically She gave him ten cents a week for shining all Her shoes for Her just as She gave Maidie twenty-five cents for brushing Her hair every day. She said rich people's children should earn their pocket money just like poor children did. Then she always said that they weren't rich but that they were more fortunate than some others. And often She forgot to pay him. He wondered whether She'd remember to pay him this week.

It was nice to have ten cents even though that wasn't very much money. You couldn't buy very much with ten cents. It would take him weeks and weeks to save up enough money to buy the things he would like to buy and that would mean he couldn't spend any of it for any of the other things, and besides She would have to remember and pay him every week. Just the same ten cents was very nice to have. A dime is such a nice little round coin. Thinner and littler than a penny but so shiny and silver. He'd rather have two dimes and a nickel than a quarter even though they were supposed to be the same thing.

He hated shining Her shoes though. Even for the dime he got for it. Sometimes She just gave him a pair of shoes and he could take them to his room and polish them up. Other times, though, She kept them on Her feet and made him shine them like a shoe shine boy. Usually then She would give him the dime right away. She never praised him, but after he'd been polishing and polishing with the rag, She'd say, "All right, that's enough, boy. I suppose I owe you ten cents."

"Yes, Ma'am," he'd have to say.

"Here it is, then."

"Thank you, Ma'am," he'd have to say.

Maidie had stopped brushing when she said, "All right, you can do my shoes now, David." But She put Her hand up to Her hair and after feeling it a minute said, "I don't think you're finished yet, Maidie, it still doesn't feel very soft."

Maidie had been holding her arm and rubbing it, but she resumed the brushing without a word. David opened the little box of polishes and brushes and rags. At least the bootblack smell was better than that perfume stuff. He hated Her more than anybody in the world and he hated Her for hurting Maidie, if he could manage to save all the ten centses and not ever spend them for anything at all he could run away, he could run away and take Maidie with him.

As he poked around the cans of polish he was thinking that, they'd run away together, he and Maidie. Later he'd tell her how they could run away together. Now he thought about it as hard as he could and maybe she'd know by mental telepathy or whatever it is. Sometimes when you think about something very hard the other person knows what it is. That's mental telepathy when that happens. So maybe Maidie knew about it right now and wouldn't feel so bad about her arm hurting. Then he shut it out of his mind. Maybe She would know what he was thinking.

But what She was saying then was talking to Maidie, "Maidie, it's no wonder that you're so clumsy. Your hands look just like a bunch of bananas in a grocery store."

At first he was glad She wasn't talking to him, then he looked up and saw Maidie turn red; she didn't say anything. Her voice was very lazy and contemplative, She said over again, "Like a bunch of ripe bananas, brown spots and all."

He dropped a can of polish. It was unbreakable, of course, so there was no harm done, just a clatter and it rolled away under a chair. She said, "What's the matter, David. It seems you're just about as clumsy as your sister."

He crawled on his hands and knees to retrieve it. He had been sitting down so long doubled up on the stool that moving made the blood rush to his head, it blackened out his eyes till he could

only see a little round patch right straight ahead. "It seems you're just about as clumsy as your sister." It echoed inside his head. Then She was saying, "Look at his big, fat behind, won't you?" His behind stuck out when he went head first under the chair to get the polish. "If he knew how fat his behind is, maybe he wouldn't eat so much. What do you think, Maidie?"

Maidie didn't say anything.

"I spoke to you, Maidie!"

"Yes." Maidie looked at Her mirror image straight in the eye. Maidie wasn't scared to look anybody in the eye. Finally it was She who looked away.

He couldn't seem to find the polish. The chair had a little flounce on it that hung down all the way around, it made a nice little tent for his head and shoulders. Of course, his behind did stick out, he knew that perfectly well. But he couldn't find the Goddamn polish anywheres.

Probably the Goddamn polish had rolled out the other side. He was glad he'd thought of swearing. It would be better, of course, if he could do it out loud. He shaped the words carefully with his tongue and lips, and let his breath out slowly, just the barest whisper of saying them out loud. All the bad words he knew and the very worst words that there were.

He'd like to say all the words right in Her face. She'd just faint. He'd scream them at Her and when She fainted and fell down he'd kick Her in the face. He lifted up the flounce and looked out the other side of the chair. There was the Goddamn polish just out of his reach sitting on the floor.

He edged himself further under the chair, he felt it begin to lift and teeter and then She began hollering at him. "David, for heaven's sake, just what do you think you're doing? Sometimes I think that you're insane as well as feeble minded. Get out from under that chair now and walk around it like a human being!"

"Balls!" he whispered.

"You heard what I said, get *out* from under that chair, immediately!"

So he had to back carefully out, and stand up and walk around the chair and lean down and pick up the polish and straighten up again. While She watched him.

"All right, come over here and polish these shoes I have on, and try to do it right."

He hadn't realised that he could feel any worse, but he did then. More than anything else he wanted to get out of there. Get away from Her and Her stinking hair, and the room and the perfume stuff, and Her voice and Her "hek, hek, hek," in a minute She'd probably start doing that again, making that laughing noise, and all the time Maidie's arm hurt her and made her wince. It made him sick to think that in a minute he'd have to touch Her shoe and feel it warm from being on Her foot.

"Would it be all right—" he began desperately.

"Would what be all right?"

"If I took them down to my room?" It is humiliating to ask a small favour and know in advance that it will be refused, and yet be compelled to ask it, be unable to resist asking it and suffering tortures when the inevitable refusal is made.

"No," She said. "You can do it right here."

Needs must. And they were black shoes and the polish he had in his hand was brown polish, of course, the polish that had caused him all the trouble was brown polish, of course. He sat down on the stool again to find the black polish. And all the while the hair brushing went on. It must be three hundred strokes, it must be five hundred strokes, at least, by this time.

She crossed her legs and held one foot out. He drew the stool close enough so that the shoe rested on his knee. She was wearing pumps and Her instep bulged a little over the top; he would have to be careful not to let any of the polish smudge Her stocking. He touched Her shoe with his hand and felt the warmth of Her foot coming through the soft leather. He closed his eyes momentarily, it made him feel sick.

All the time he never looked at anything except Her shoe, or sometimes down into his box of supplies. He could have gotten

a good view of Her legs. She had them crossed at Her knees, and though She'd put on a peignoir over Her dress, it was open in front and Her skirt hiked up. Her legs were long and shapely. Men are supposed to like looking at legs. It was all he could do to look at Her feet without getting sick.

"Hek, hek, hek," She had begun again. What was it now She thought so funny. Her foot jiggled when She laughed, call it laughing. Call it that if you want. He was close to tears. He was carefully patting the sticky black wax on the shoe, but the foot was jiggling so he wasn't sure that he wouldn't smudge Her stocking.

"I'm sorry," She said acidly, and held Her foot still for a minute.

Then "hek, hek, hek: You did look funny under the chair just now."

No answer.

Well, She didn't expect an answer.

"Maidie!"

The girl was in some kind of trance, the brush was lifted and then lowered automatically, her arm still pained her and with each descent her eyes blinked, but even that had become meaningless and machinelike, she stared down at the shining, crackling hair, the really beautiful hair, but rapt and unseeing.

"Maidie!" more sharply.

"Ye-es?"

"You ought to brush your own hair once in a while. You look like a mildewed mouse. Hek, hek, hek."

"Hek, hek, hek." She thought it was fantastically funny.

He had finished with that shoe. He took the rag away and sat hunched over gazing blankly at the shining surface. He was saying to himself, it'll be over, it'll all be over in fifteen minutes. One can stand anything for fifteen minutes, the dentist, an earache, they hold you down and pierce your ears, but it passes, it gets over with. In fifteen minutes it'll be over. She'll give me the dime.

"All right, that's enough, boy. I suppose I owe you ten cents."

"Yes, Ma'am."

"Here it is, then."

"Thank you, Ma'am."

He'd have it and he'd put in his pocket. He'd pick up his box of shoe polishes and carry it under his arm, and he could stride out of the little boudoir, away from Her and Her hair and Her perfume stuff and Her shoes, and through the vast master bedroom where She and Father slept in the enormous double bed, walking around the heavy-piled pale buff coloured carpet, not across it ("David, how many times have I told you not to walk across that carpet with your dirty feet!") walking around on the edge of bare floor except in one place where he had to step on it to get around the chiffonier, gaining the doorway at last, and going down the hall, still walking on the bare floor, carefully not walking on the strip carpeting, to his own room, and going in and shutting the door.

Maidie. She did *not* look like a mildewed mouse. She was beautiful and pretty. She was the prettiest person in the whole world. He'd have a dime. He had saved some already. How many, he wasn't sure. He'd like to take them out of his pocket and count them, but he wouldn't dream of it in front of Her. Four, maybe five. It would be six with the new one. Maybe that would be enough.

He wondered whether it possibly would be enough. He wondered whether it was four or five dimes he had already. He slipped his hand in his pocket and tried to feel how many there were.

She finally saw that he was finished with that shoe and recrossed Her legs presenting him with the other foot. As She put it on his knee, however, Her foot slipped and the toe of Her shoe touched him lightly in the groin. Immediately She withdrew it and put it on his knee, but he was filled with panic.

If you touch yourself there you go insane. That's what they said, but if She touched him there he was absolutely certain that he would just die. She had touched him there, he could still feel the impact of the pointed shoe. He began dabbing at it desperately with the polish. He had begun to blush, he could feel himself get-

ting hot all over. He could feel himself down there and he could feel the back of his neck and his face, like it must be all swelling and prickly. Dab, dab, dab on the shoe. Clumsy. He'd smudged Her stocking.

"Maidie," She was saying, "I guess that's enough now. You can stop now, if you want to. Thank you very much, it feels much softer now."

Suddenly She whipped Her head forward, and the hair fell against his face, sweet smelling, soft and silky: Awful. Only for an instant and She shook it back again, "There, David, don't you agree that it's nice and soft?"

"And Maidie," She continued, "Remember what I said about brushing your own hair once in a while. You're not very pretty, but if you had nice hair it would help."

Maidie put the hair brush down. It was silver with a heavily ornamented back, bas-relief cherubs and roses. After a moment, Maidie picked it up and combed the hair out of it.

"I was wondering whether you'd remember, Maidie."

Maidie put it carefully beside the other combs and brushes and hand mirror on the dressing table, she stood then with her hands clasped, hiding the fingers, if the fingers had been extended it would have been an attitude of prayer, almost, but the hands were knotted together in little fists.

"All right, Maidie, you can go now."

Alone. Alone with Her. He would have given anything in the world to go with Maidie, accompany her out of that pestilential room. Not only go with her away from this, but to be with her and tell her, Maidie, I think you're pretty, I think you're the prettiest girl in the whole world. And Maidie let's run away. I have money. It's five dimes or six dimes, and I'll work. I can get a job. Nobody will know how old I am. I'm big for my age and I can tell them I'm ten or eleven, maybe, and I can get a job, delivering newspapers or selling magazines, they let boys do that when they're ten or eleven, or I could shine shoes. I'm pretty good at shining shoes. And Maidie, I want to take you away from all this,

Maidie, Maidie, don't be sad. I'll fix everything. You'll see, Maidie.

Rub, rub, rub with the rag. Pulling it down with one hand and then with the other, up down, up down, it gives it a good shine that way and quick too. In no time he'd be finished, and She'd give him the dime, and he could go and put the stuff in his room and then go and talk to Maidie.

"You know your sister really should take care of herself better. Unfortunately she's not pretty at all, but it would make up for it a little if she were more careful about her appearance."

All the while flirting with Her image in the mirror. Caressing Her hair, looking at one three-quarters face, then the other, lifting up the hand mirror and examining Her profile, smiling at Herself, raising Her eyebrows, lowering them, She pursed Her lips together and blew Herself a kiss.

"Well," She said suddenly.

It made him jump, "Yes?"

"Aren't you finished yet?"

"Yes, Ma'am, I think so."

She leaned forward to look, scowled a little when She saw the smudge on Her stocking. He was looking down at the shoe, She wriggled Her toes making the gleam strike off here then there, he'd done a good job except for the smudge on Her stocking, Her foot was off his knee now and between his legs, wriggling slowly and slowly advancing towards him, slow and shining and black coming at him, he glanced desperately up at Her face but it told him nothing, She seemed to be just frowning at the little smudge on Her stocking, then down again, it was almost touching him.

That black thing, shiny and black and slow and wriggling toes underneath, pointed right at him. An eternity. Then it was against him, rubbing and nudging and poking. Stabbing.

He jumped to his feet and ran pell-mell out of the room, he half stumbled on the rug, cut directly across it, gained the hall. Somehow he had managed to grab up his bootblack box, and as he ran stamping, never mind the racket, the tins came loose and clattered out behind him, bang against the wall, bang against the floor,

bang against the big chiffonier, bang, bang, bang all the way down the hall, and into his room and slammed the door shut. Bang.

Somehow Miller was managing to keep up some kind of conversation with Sandra Widd. It gave him a pleasant sense of virtuosity to talk with a lovely girl who insisted on "seriousness" and all the while think of something else, not even her charms that loomed over him.

"After all," he was saying, "name any modern artist you like, you won't find one that's more non-objective than Walt Disney."

"Picasso—"

"Perfectly a case in point. Bla, bla, bla, whoever saw a woman with two eyes on the side of her face. But whoever saw a mouse that looks like Micky Mouse, or a man that looks like Micky Mouse. Micky Mouse doesn't look like anything in the known universe. But your great American art lover who hates art just dotes on Micky Mouse or Crazy Cat or Dumbo or any other distorted little representation they can find. They fill their houses with piggy banks that don't look like pigs or Kewpie dolls that don't look like babies or adorable little elephants that look like coprolites and nothing else . . ."

Distinctly the evening was getting confused. The singing foursome were singing hymns. Norma Leach who had a thin scratchy voice apparently knew the words, but the others obviously didn't nor even necessarily the tunes. They joined in loudly, nevertheless. Rudy Nace waited with his mouth open, whenever the others stopped momentarily between selections he would try to oblige with the hoary "Walking Down Canal Street," promptly to be drowned out with "Glory, Glory, Hallelujah."

Belinda and Billie Kerne were solemnly dancing together over by the radio, a very slow two-step to a jitterbug arrangement of Blue Skies. Miller looked at his watch, a quarter past two. Only a quarter past two. One hour and forty-five minutes still to go

before he arrived at the blessed four o'clock in the morning, he'd thought it was six hours and fifteen minutes ago.

He had a hangnail on his thumb that hurt when he stroked it backwards. The skin around it was somewhat red and inflamed. It was probably getting infected and he'd die of blood poisoning. He kept on squeezing it and stroking the hangnail backwards.

Eustace Widd saw him sitting at his wife's feet. By this time, Miller was sitting on the floor and Sandra's feet were nearby. Eustace came over to join him. He sat down awkwardly, sighed and remarked, "You know I'd much rather sit around in the evening drinking Coca Cola than this stuff." He looked disparagingly into his empty cocktail glass.

"Well, that's very interesting," said Miller kindly.

"Coca Cola now that's a fine drink. Everybody in France is drinking it now instead of wine. They tried to pass a law against it but the French people wouldn't stand for it, nosiree. Those Frenchmen aren't so dumb, as Sandra here can tell you. Me, I'd ten times rather have a good ice cold glass of Coca Cola any day than the best Chateau Neuf du Pape that's made."

Eustace and Miller looked at each other for a few seconds and Miller said "Ah" like a man obeying a doctor.

Suddenly Miller sprang to his feet and rushed to the door and opened it. He was gesticulating wildly and shouting, "Come on, come on, folks, we're going to the carnival, we're going to the fair. Step right up, folks, this way, folks!"

"For heaven's sakes, Ed!" from Belinda.

"Come on, we'll take the gin along and the vermouth if anybody wants it and the whiskey and the Coca Cola, and let's go to the fair."

"Yes, it would be fun to go for a walk," piped Norma Leach.

"It's a lovely night out," said Billie Kerne.

"Come on, let's go, let's go."

"You folks can go if you want, I'm staying right here."

"Oh come on, Rudy."

"Baby, it's dark outside," the tattooed sailor observed to Norma.

Out they trooped into the night. Miller and Belinda brought up the rear; he put his arm around her. He raved like a madman, little fevered words hurried out of him, "We're going to the carnival and ride the loop-the-loops and we'll ride in the tunnel of love and eat taffy candy, Belinda Fine, Belinda Fine, my lovely, beautiful Belinda Fine."

The closed up, boarded up city of fun looked singularly like a city of the dead in the wan moonlight. A city of prehistoric dead, skeletal dinosaurs, looming tyrannosaurus, creeping monsters, ichthyosaurus washed up on this shore, triceratops, insignificant in this company, but solid and black, crumpled, grounded pterodactyl. It was here that the carefree later mammalia strolled. Order of anthropoidea, highest of the primate suborders, homo sapiens, representing a special family hominidae, having a brain and a brain case of great size, absolutely and relatively as compared with the face, the body erect in locomotion, and the great toe not opposable.

See Mivart *Philosophical Catechism*: Man, according to Mivart, shares with the animal (1) the functions of animal life and instinct, (2) a power of sensation and of faint reproduction of sensation in imagination (fantasy), sensuous memory and dim sense-perceptions, (3) a power of organic inference, (4) appetites, sensuous emotions, and emotional language, and (5) organic volition. He is distinguished from the mere animal by (1) abstraction, (2) intellectual perception, (3) self-consciousness, (4) reflection, (5) intellectual (rational) memory, (6) judgment, (7) intellectual synthesis and induction, (8) ratiocination, (9) intellectual intuition, (10) higher (or intellectual) emotions or sentiments, (11) rational language, and (12) a true power of will.

The shaded portion of the earth, ill-lit by moonlight slid sideways towards another dawn, these Jurassic pliosaurus and cretaceous polyptychodon extinct in the dawn of tertiary, long-lived diplocynodon saw miocene morn from the English Hampshire's

Hordwell cliffs, an eon's lying down in the darkness of clay and limestone and oölites, hacked out by the geologist's spade, live again this night, not in truth but in fancy, in phantasmagoria, the transformed, transmogrified impedimenta of past and future vacuous merry-makers—man, woman and child with the great toe not opposable.

"And therefore," said Miller in a sepulchral voice, "never send to know . . ."

"For whom the bell tolls," Belinda interrupted him.

"Oh I read that when it first came out," said Phil.

"I saw the movie. I think Ingrid Bergman is the adorablest thing," said Billie Kerne.

"I was just going to say 'and therefore never send to know why I said we should come here.' " Miller said stiffly.

"Oh it's fun," said Billie Kerne.

"What's the matter? Sad? Belinda, giving you a hard time?"

The chatter went on and on, chirping peepings of little birds in a hedge when lights are suddenly shone on them in the dark. It was cold and chilly and disquieting. Only old scaffoldings and outbuildings, the drained and daimed "biggest swimming pool in the world" an empty eye socket, faintly glimmering white in the moon drowned landscape. Sand under their feet, cold and soft and sifting into their shoes.

There were only the four of them now. Eustace Widd and Sandra had excused themselves in the street in front of Belinda's house. Phoebe Buttersworth, the solid Phoebe, so far as Miller was concerned, had melted away after tracing the fictitious Herbert Buttersworth to Elgin, Illinois. Rudy Parkinson had just wandered off somewhere between Belinda's and the fair grounds, so that made it eight who had actually come, for the hymn singing quartette had tagged along for a while, Eddie Nace and Tina Grosz and Norma Leach and the tattooed sailor.

And although it had been Miller's inspiration to come to this place, it was the tattooed sailor, veteran of rigging the crow's-nest, who devised the way to get over the poor landmen's fences.

Private Property. Keep out. No Trespassing. Violators Will Be Prosecuted. Danger. No Admittance. Pious signs placarding the stout fence. "They really mean it," he said merrily, and nimbly and instantly scrambled aloft, up a supporting pole and down the other side to let them walk in like kings and queens through a gate that was merely bolted from within.

Lighthearted. Surely at such a time one should be lighthearted and gay. Misdemeanours should not be perpetrated lugubriously. Forlorn riot, lachrymose bacchanalia, sorry revelry, wine, women, and song—gin, hymns and Belinda, grey authors of melancholy.

The singing foursome departed behind the boarded up tunnel of love. Now they were sitting on the still platform of a merry-go-round, there were a number of them scattered over the lot, this one had little cars and airplanes instead of more usual horses. Phil Johnson was making time with Billie, and Miller sat coldly beside Belinda, cold and sober and faintly hungry.

She was a good girl really, so kind, so patient, so complaisant. The moonlight shone on her hands, so long and narrow, folded so meekly in her lap, he looked at them for a great while, they would be cold and somewhat damp, the skin rough to touch; he must do what was expected.

Fully and confidently expected. Upside down world, we are ashamed not to be shameless, thou shalt is more compelling than thou shalt not. She had his manhood in either case, whether he should or should not. It was no wonder that she could be kind and patient, she had already trapped him with her complaisance.

Women. He had a sudden suffocating sensation that the entire female half of the human race had been loaded on his back. A Santa Claus sack weighing him down, young women, old women, pretty women, ugly women, short ones, tall ones, thin ones, fat ones, silent ones, chatty ones, shy, bold, wise, silly, good, bad. La Pucina, La Pucina, La Pucina, unhappiest of men, Don Juan, they all of one accord had but one aim in life—the hand that rocks the cradle rules the world—you and me, that is, more specifically me, on his back, bearing him down, down, down.

Down the tedious list of man's special attributes, down from the precarious mezzanine—Thou hast made him a little lower than the angels—apples they offer you, and leaves that they have thievishly torn from fig trees.

First, it is the power of will, true and otherwise; the gentleman spider who is merely paralysed and eaten, gets off lightly. Power of will and higher emotions or sentiments, down intellectual intuition, ratiocination, synthesis and induction. Down judgment, down rational memory, down self-consciousness, down perception, down abstraction. Down, down, down, reduced to salt and jelly; exchange me for a polyp.

And he'd have an infernal time with her slacks, with zippers, and snappers and buttons and hooks. I have no one to blame but myself, it was a prayer.

Sloping against his dim vision, two shadows, Billie and Phil slipping away; unhoucelled, disappointed, unaneled, made off with each other, happy as can be, believe you me. He was aware of Belinda slowly turning towards him in the darkness.

Miller went striding on ahead, Belinda, a lazy rear. They were lost which seemed to Miller to be The End. "This is The End, the Absolute End, I tell you, I cannot bear it! Where in Christ's name is that Goddamn gate! Why didn't you look where we're going. You live here, don't you, how can you get lost in a place where you've been thousands of times before! Is this the place where we're supposed to turn left? Can you tell me that!"

And on and on. Belinda thought it was funny.

Confounded woman's humour.

"It's the Absolute End," he kept muttering, meant it too.

It was beastly cold and his clothes were full of sand. Cold, gritty, horrible sand. "I don't know what you think is so Goddamn funny." They were standing at the head of a "crazy street." An Aisle of Fun, it was called by a peeling wooden archway. The stalls were

boarded up, of course, but their turreted or minareted or igloored tops showed up plainly in the moonlight.

"I know we didn't come this way, but does it lead to any gate or any door?"

"I haven't the faintest idea."

They kept coming back to the "biggest swimming pool in the world." If they could find its inlet that would at least lead them to the boardwalk and beach. Then they had to skirt around bath houses and other diverting buildings till they lost the swimming pool.

Then they lost each other. New panic, new desperation. He didn't dare call out to her for fear of arousing a night watchman. No Trespassing. Violators Will Be Prosecuted. At that point he had to remember the Goddamn signs. So he tried calling out in a low voice, "Belinda! Belinda!" In a voice that was probably too low for her to hear him. "Belinda, where are you!" Trying to go back to the place where he had last seen her, and not being able to find that. "Belinda, Belinda!" His throat was sore. He'd probably caught cold.

As if he didn't have enough worries.

And he didn't have any cigarettes.

Belinda had some. Kools.

"Belinda, Belinda!" Bleating like a lost little sheep.

He was standing in the middle of a fairly large open space; the ferris wheel was to his right. He had noticed it before but he couldn't remember whether it had been on his right or his left. He had remembered seeing it and stashing it away in his mind as a tyrannosaurus. How Goddamn unfunny can you get! Beyond that was the roller coaster and somewhere over there was the ocean. He would do anything in the world for a drink of water.

One stands with one's feet far apart and arms akimbo in the middle of a fairly large open space in the middle of the jolly old fair grounds and one is the only person left alive and it is The End. The sun has cooled off and gotten dim. It isn't any brighter than the moon, and if one is the last mortal being left alive in the uni-

verse, it is natural and inevitable for one to be set down in the middle of an amusement park. Of course it is deathly cold. Absolute zero, minus 270 degrees or whatever it is or near it.

But, of course, the sun is supposed to get so hot first before it cools off that all the seas have boiled dry. I love Irene, God knows I do, I'll love her till the seas run dry. In any case the ocean was still there making its old roar against the beach. He must still love Irene and it isn't the end of the world. Yct.

"Belinda, Belinda!"

Taking a chance on not waking up the night watchman and hollering at the top of his lungs. Standing spang in the middle of a large, moonlit area, a black speck in a space, a sitting pigeon for anybody with a rifle. You don't hear the explosion, and maybe or maybe not you see a blinding flash or feel a searing pain. Dead men don't tell tales. Anyway you're blown to hell and you can pick out a good hot spot and stoke up the fires and wait for Jessica Straihg Albany to arrive.

Belinda turned up.

"Where the hell were you?"

"If you must know I was heeding a call of nature. A shriek of nature, rather."

When one knows a woman one is generally obliged to know more than one wants to know. In any case he felt enormously relieved, and practically cheerful. He linked his arm through hers and they strolled in a debonair, not lost, way across the square. "I suppose when it gets light, we'll be able to find our way out."

"We'll be able to find it before that."

They went into the Aisle of Fun, which turned out to be a blind alley and then came out again.

"Hssst!" They drew back into the shadow. Ahead, a round flashlight gleam on the sand, yellowish and two legs and a voice singing, a quavering falsetto. Then the legs and the flashlight, emerged into the open moonlight, the light was drowned, a dwarfish, tented figure, colours bright enough to be marked in the moonlight, striped, remembered red and white, pyramid style

coat with bell-shaped sleeves, exaggerated lapels and cuffs, remembered yellow, a black hat, pointed as a witch's.

"Marty Noman!" Belinda called out.

The figure halted and looked around, uncanny black eyes in a white face, quick motions of the head. The flashlight lifted up and pointed at them. Belinda was running forward. "Marty Noman, thank God we've found you! Will you show us how to get out of this place!"

If Marty recognised her he didn't show it. He remained quite still, open mouthed. Miller followed after Belinda diffidently. "Hello there," he said finally.

The little creature stared from one to the other, wordless.

"Please show us the way, Marty. You've got a flashlight."

He looked down at the torch and snapped it off. He moved it so the moonlight glinted against its shiny side. "Yes," he said finally. "She's a pretty good flashlight, all right."

Then he turned around and minced away.

"We'll follow him," said Belinda. After a few steps he turned his head to see whether they were.

"Here goes your good name, Belinda Fine," Miller whispered in her ear.

"Pooh."

The little elfish figure twinkled away in front of them. They had to hurry to keep up.

"I'm real sorry," Miller added.

"Don't worry," said Belinda gently. "The name isn't good, it's fine, there's a distinction, you know."

"You have a beautiful name, Belinda Fine."

"Yes, lover."

"I really mean it. And I think you're beautiful."

"Then you aren't mad any more."

"Mad!" He was astounded.

"Angry."

"Oh, I wasn't mad."

"Okay."

"Really and truly."

"Okay, Chum."

"Only I guess I haven't got a very mature mind," he said slowly.

Their guide was standing at the gate. With his pointed hat and flaring coat, he looked like the stylised picture of a Christmas tree, only the top was a little awry.

"Thank you very much, Marty. You were a Godsend. I don't know what we would have done. Wandered around there all night, I guess."

"Thanks, man, thanks a million." Miller's embarrassment had returned.

The little man merely nodded his head. Then as they were passing through the gate he whispered in Miller's ear, "You've seen her!"

"Who?"

"You've seen the old one, her, the way she really is, not the way you think she is."

"What?"

"The old one, the old one out there." He raised his hand pointing in an arc, the sleeve fell back from his wrist. Long, skinny, pointing arm. "You've seen her all right."

"Yes, I guess so." Completely mystified; startled.

"Her."

"Yes."

"The sea."

"Oh."

"Well, see ya, Marty, goodnight," said Belinda.

"Goodnight, and thanks again."

"Goodnight to you too, and God be with you."

The gate closed and they were walking up the street.

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X Chapter 8 X
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MARTY NOMAN had gone with Dissy as far as Mrs. Albany's gate. Dissy had combed her hair and Marty had offered to get her some breakfast but she hadn't wanted anything. Then they walked up the beach, Marty a little ahead, because in spite of herself Dissy held back.

It was a beautiful morning. The mist and fog had gone and the sun stood in a pale, wide sky. Below, the sea was calm and flat, mirroring, and faintly opalescent as a morning lake; the waves that rode up on its broad half-moon of shore reduced to miniature. The very air was still with only the faintest stirrings of breeze so that a solemn procession of fluffy, white clouds becalmed on the horizon dissipated in long fingers of vapour, streaked and barred that portion of sky.

Marty Noman stopped from time to time, swinging his head the way a bird dog does, sniffing the air. "There's gonna be a storm," he said finally.

Dissy smiled, "it's beautiful now."

"You wait though, it'll be a real honey of a storm." He held up his finger, "Listen!"

She listened and heard a faint steady sound over the lapping of the waves, it was a deep, mournful, resonant buzzing of myriads of flies. Now she saw them on the boardwalk crawling sluggishly along the wooden railing or on the benches. They were the size of houseflies but with heavier, wider bodies and of a dusty, greenish colour.

They swarmed below on the sand, sucking at the brine, settling upon salvages, blackening where they lit with their mass.

"It's the warm weather brings them out, Miss, but they'll blow away in the storm, you wait."

"Poor flies."

"They sting like a bastard."

"It's what they have to do. I mean they don't do it on purpose or hurt."

"I don't guess I ever thought of that, Miss." He smiled. They walked a little farther in silence, then he added, "Maybe they don't really blow away. Maybe when it starts getting windy they just creep into the ground and wait for it to get over with."

When they got to the end of the boardwalk, Dissy hesitated lightly looking at the trampled sandy path among the dunes. "May I hold your hand now?"

"Yes, Miss."

They walked the rest of the way hand in hand and in silence, but the gate Dissy stopped. "I will go by myself now."

"Yes, Miss."

The silver house towered above her, now the windows backed by the drawn blinds were bright with the reflection of the sea and the sky, its roof was blinding in the sun, pillar and tower and shining coffee pot set on the range of sand.

"Goodbye."

"Goodbye, Miss."

He had stood and watched her go up the path to the house. He waited while she waited on the porch for the door to open. He could hear the dogs barking from within and Mrs. Albany calling out. Dissy had turned and waved at him. Then when the door opened and she went inside, he had gone back to town.

He had not seen her somewhat later run out of the house and dart into the dunes to make a wide circle back of the building, crossing the highway twice on her way back to the unlocked side gate of the amusement park, seeking the dubious peace inside.

Mrs. Albany in the heap of scarves and shawls and blankets that

covered her was an all but shapeless seated figure that slid backwards on shining, soundless wheels; only her face emerged narrow and white with its sharp chin raised, and her hands rigid on her lap.

In the night of alarms, the flesh on her face had shrivelled against the bone in a fine tessellation of minute wrinkles and folds that caught and held every shadow, darkening her countenance so that even from a slight distance her face appeared to be sprinkled over with a dusty shade from which the great eyes bulged and shone dully like chips of unburnt coal bedded in ash.

Dissy stood uncertainly just inside the threshold with the seething mass of barking, growling dogs at her knees while Mrs. Tandy lunged and lurched among them like a leviathan in the flood shouting, "You Spot, you Shep, you shut up there, Pinkie. Hush up! Hush up, I say, you wild Indians!"

Mr. Poco shrieked from his cage, "Polly, Polly, hello Polly, hello Polly, Polly, Polly, Polly."

Daylight streamed through the open door into the wildly disordered room, fell upon the furniture still in a ring about the empty space on the floor—Mrs. Albany had moved to the far side, but the chairs and tables and chests of drawers remained like a patient audience and the lamps shed against the day what looked to be a brown and fitful light.

Dissy looked around with blinking, unaccustomed eyes, she could see Mrs. Tandy smiling at her between bawlings at the dogs, but Mrs. Tandy's face was strange to her though it was smiling and kindly. The other face that did not smile was strange also, but the thin lips opened and a voice whispered, "Dissy!"

Mrs. Tandy finally managed to disperse the dogs who ran howling and shrieking into the outer labyrinth of piled up furniture to bark continuously and dementedly from there. The thin wailing cry coming from Mrs. Albany could at last be heard. "Shut the door, Mrs. Tandy, shut the door. Shut it, I say."

Surely she had said, "Dissy, Dissy, it is you, you've come home, my child." But the barking dogs had drowned the sound and

now she was only saying, "Shut the door, Mrs. Tandy, shut the door. Shut it, I say," but she had said already, "Dissy, I am glad to see you. I'm so glad that you've come home." The sweet air blew in from the beach behind her, fresh with salt and wet. Dissy smiled.

"Lor'." Mrs. Tandy made a face, "It stinks like a kennel in here, Missus. The air . . ."

"Shut it, I say, Mrs. Tandy!"

Mrs. Tandy shrugged, she stepped toward Dissy and reaching behind her swung the door to. She smiled at the girl, "You'll have to forgive the dogs, Miss. They'll be the death of me yet."

The other did not speak or smile. It was suddenly so dark in here with the doors closed. The other did not speak because she could not shout above the barking and she did not smile because she was frowning at the dogs. That was why she sat so still and quiet, only her hands moved in her lap jerkily pushing at the shawls and blankets that covered her knees.

Mrs. Tandy said, "You see, we weren't expecting you, Miss."

Dissy looked at her blankly. "I beg your pardon?"

"Polly, Polly, Polly, Polly. Heli · Polly!"

"But—"

Mrs. Albany started to speak, "I—" A fresh volley of barking cut her off.

All the voices rose at once, flooding, senseless as zoo noises, jibbering, a flotsam, jetsam of words, meaningless and disconnected, matching the visual chaos in this room. Dissy closed her eyes and cried out, "I've come home, Mother, I've come home!"

"It's good Miss, we're glad you're here." Mrs. Tandy smiled and spoke with a heartiness she certainly didn't feel, and patted the girl's shoulder.

Mrs. Albany stared at her daughter with hard, unwinking eyes. Actually, as she sat there the whole night's weariness returned, numbing her mind and sense. She visioned only death and suffocating darkness flowing inexorably into her being, upwelling blackness that brimmed the edges of her consciousness, beyond

it, dimly descried, a figure that was no more than a shadow behind a curtain, so faintly perceived, the girl who held out her arms and cried out in a clear strong voice, "Mother, darling, it's me, Dissy. I've come home. Mother I'm better. Isn't that good?"

Dissy stood in the centre of the circle of brilliant light. The rosy light from the brass lamps behind her, the white glare from overhead, her upturned palms held the light and the backs of her hands were lighted from below, her hair fell over her face without a shadow and her eyes were shadowless, even as she bowed a little towards her mother there was no shadow upon her face or anywhere, only upon the floor the faint transparent casts of shade that radiated from where she stood.

"I came, Mother, and I've found you."

"Polly, Polly, Polly, Polly. Hello, Polly!"

Pinkie leaped to the top of the bureau next to the girl, barked shrilly, mercilessly.

"Stop it, stop it, get down, you wild Indian. Yes, Miss, like I say, we're real glad you're here."

Mrs. Albany looked around abstractedly, glanced at the ring of furniture and then upwards at the crazy network of electric cords above, next at the parrot's cage, then finally back at the girl, her eyes as empty as water.

"What are you doing here?" she asked wearily.

"Mother I've come home." Her mother looked at her now and in a minute she would say that she was glad, she would say, I am glad Dissy. Dissy waited smiling.

But Mrs. Albany looked away again, she closed her hands into fists and knocked them lightly and helplessly against the arms of her chair.

"I don't understand," she said at last.

Dissy stepped forward and then stopped: one of the police dogs had insinuated herself between a desk and a chest of drawers, the black, wolflike head emerged snarling ferociously, less than a yard away.

"You, Spot, get back there. I'll hit you with a stick of wood,"

screamed Mrs. Tandy. The dog slunk off, unwillingly, padded restlessly back and forth, invisibly behind the furniture.

"Polly, Polly, Polly, Polly."

Mrs. Tandy put her hand on Dissy's shoulder. "You sit down, Miss," she said kindly, "It'll be better if you sit down. I'll make us all a good pot of coffee. We'll all feel a whole lot better when we get something inside us."

Dissy sat down gratefully but awkwardly on a couch from which the cushions had been removed. She wrapped her arms around her knees; the dogs made her very nervous, she had always been afraid of animals and out of the corner of her eye she could see the one that had been driven away a moment before stealthily making its way towards the other end of the couch. Then she looked at her mother.

But the other woman was leaning over her and speaking in a low voice, "Your mother has had a bad night, Miss." Her voice assumed its normal heartiness, "Lor' Miss Dissy, you just set here for a while and I'll make us some coffee. And I have to make a little phone call but don't you be bothered paying me any mind."

"No," said Mrs. Albany suddenly.

"What Missus?"

"What is it, Mother?"

Mrs. Albany looked upwards at the ceiling, "No," she said again, she lowered her head slightly but still kept her eyes fixed above, then she swallowed painfully. "No, Annie, I mean no telephone calls, please."

"But Missus!" She tried to give her mistress a significant look but the other still stared at the ceiling.

"No, no telephoning, if you please."

"Well, acourse it can wait for a bit, it can wait till later. But I'll make some coffee for us. We'd feel a lot better having a cup of coffee."

"Yes," said Mrs. Albany woodenly, "make some coffee then."

Mrs. Tandy padded away. She had hurried too much to answer the door to put on her shoes, and the sound of her stockinged feet

on the floor was soft and heavy. She threaded her way through the furniture back to the cook stove, "Lor', Lor'," she said to herself and shook her head.

For a long while Mrs. Albany and Dissy sat quiet, facing each other, not speaking. The dogs were silent now and calmed; Spot, the police dog that had been skulking around the end of the couch, now came out openly and sat panting at her mistress' feet, her tongue lolled out and she seemed to grin as she gazed at Dissy out of half closed yellow eyes.

Suddenly Dissy was saying, "There's a girl there . . . at Sunny-side, I mean . . . well her name was Polly. I didn't know her very well because she lived in the M building, but we both worked in the cafeteria putting spoons and forks on the trays. We're not allowed to have knives . . . I only worked there for three days but Polly worked there all the time. I mean people used to call out to her, 'Hello Polly.'" She stopped talking as suddenly as she had started, swallowing uncasily.

"Well . . . well," Mrs. Albany said at length. Her mind had returned out of the labyrinth of her memories of the night before leaving her slightly lightheaded to the present with a faint sense that she had been ridiculous, wondered mistily why she hadn't known that Dissy was coming, filled with the stabbing apprehension of one whose memory fails. She smiled thinly at the girl, "Well, I had forgotten that you were coming, Dissy."

"What, Mother?"

"I didn't realise that you were coming."

Dissy lifted her bright golden head and gazed radiantly at her mother. "I didn't know myself, Mother, yesterday. Then . . . then . . . Mother, I've wanted to come so much."

"Yes . . ."

Dissy pressed her hands together, in a moment her mother would say it, say, "Dissy dear, I am so glad you have come, I've wanted you to come so much," soon she would say that. She waited and then she could not wait any longer.

"Mother, you're glad I came, please say you're glad I came."

She spoke timidly and shyly, but she did not feel timid or shy, she felt happiness and eagerness too much, there was no room for any other feeling.

"Well, yes, of course," Mrs. Albany answered dryly. "But you should have written that you were coming . . . dear."

Her dry tone filled Dissy with unspeakable anguish. She sat mute, digging her fingernails into the palms of her hands, she realised that her hands were rather dirty and that also each finger was tipped with a little crescent moon of grime. She remembered about her hair, she wondered whether during the walk along the beach to the house, it had become mussed.

But her mother had said, of course she was glad and she had said "dear." She had imagined the other, the dryness, that was all the trouble with her now imagining things and being too sensitive, Dr. Peter said she mustn't worry and she was better now. Her mother didn't even know that she was better and she had said, "yes, of course (I am glad you have come, Dissy) . . . dear." Those were her exact words and she had said, "but you should have written that you were coming." And she *had* written. Now she recovered from her dismay and she smiled.

"I did write to you, Mother. Didn't you get my letter?"

Wearily, Mrs. Albany tried to concentrate. "What letter—no, I didn't get any letter. No."

"I wrote you a letter."

"Yes, you did," Mrs. Albany answered slowly. "Yes . . . but he took it away. I remember now *he* took the letter away." Her hands tightened convulsively, grasped each other so tightly that the knuckles stood out yellow as lemons through the blotched skin. She stared at Dissy but she didn't see the girl, merely a jumbled brilliance of light and dark. "*He* was here and he *took* it!"

"Who, Mother, who? Mother, Mother what is it!"

Her mother's face was so strange, it was terrible and strange, it was so pale and yet so dark. She frowned and it was a fearful frown so that a black line marked her forehead, a great black cleft as though her face had been split with a hatchet, her eyes grew

small and dark, their shape was altered by the tensing of the flesh around them, her lips had hardened and she raised her chin.

"What is it, Mother?"

Mrs. Albany heard a voice saying, "What is it, Mother?" Then she heard nothing except a sound like beating wings in her ears, buffetings and whistlings. *I know you, Mrs. Albany, I am . . .* then nothing except the room was hot, the air pressed in on her, stinging, choking as a noxious smoke, hot, she dared not breathe the poisonous heat of the room and the chill was in her, dank and heavy, made her clench her teeth so they would not rattle in her head. He was bending over her taking the letter away. The preparations weren't of any use. He had been knocking at the door and then they had opened the door.

She leaned back wearily in her chair.

"What is it, Mother? Mother what is it?" Someone was speaking to her. There was someone by her in the room who was speaking. The person who was speaking had a lovely voice, it was sweet and clear and confident. Mrs. Albany lifted her hand.

She might have been lifting a great weight, it was difficult to raise her hand, it was so stiff and cold, she raised it to her ear and cupped it behind to better hear that voice.

"But it doesn't matter about the letter, Mother."

Her hand had moved upwards through the freezing air, before it had been hot, but now it was cold and the hand was cold, her arm was weighted down with the weight of sleeves and sweaters and the shawls on her shoulders, but they gave no warmth.

The voice came from a distance, an infinite space separated her from that voice, but the voice crossed it, gentle and tender and caring.

"Mother, don't worry about the letter. I can tell you everything it said. Please don't feel sad that it was lost. I'm here, Mother, here with you and you're glad, I'm here. You said you were glad I came."

Mrs. Albany listened to the voice and nodded her head. She had noticed that her hand was cold held against her ear, and her

ear was cold also. She thought calmly, well, the end of life is cold, the flesh prepares for the earth by giving up each day a little of its life and warmth; the blind cells make their preparations; it is only in the mind that the preparations lack, in the face of reason it seeks a longer completion, torments itself with fears that will not pass.

But the fear was leaving her as she listened to the voice. She felt weak and shaken and it was hard to listen to the words but it was easy to listen to the voice, she would try to listen to the words also.

Dissy could not bear to look into that strange, angry, bitter face. It frightened her to see her mother look so strange, she cried out, "Mother, what is it?" and then she said again, "What is it, Mother?" She looked down at the floor where all the shadows were, crossing and criss crossing, lighter shadows and darker shadows, then she saw the dog looking at her with a soft pink tongue lolling over the white pointed teeth. The dog was black and its eyes were yellow. "What is it, Mother?"

Then she looked up and there was something infinitely sad and lonely about that face, it had changed when she wasn't looking and the terribleness had gone, what was left was only forlorn and grieving; her mother raised her hand and smiled a little.

"Mother, it doesn't matter about the letter." Dissy blushed. "Mother, don't worry about the letter. I can tell you everything it said. Please don't feel sad that it was lost. I'm here, Mother, here with you and you're glad I'm here. You said you were glad I came."

Dissy saw her mother lean back in her chair, her face softened and smoothed, the black shadow went away from between her eyebrows and the eyes turned towards her now, they were not angry any more or bitter but gentle and mild.

Dissy smiled uncertainly. "I said lots of silly things in the letter. It was awfully long and silly. In a way I'm glad you didn't get it." She felt embarrassed but she felt happy again, her mother was looking at her so kindly. "I sent you all the old letters I wrote and

then I wrote you a new letter to show you how different I am. You see, I'm well, Mother. I'm practically well, that's what I wanted you to know and now I can come home and take care of you."

Mrs. Albany was looking at the person now who was speaking. All the words came so quickly it was difficult to follow them. The girl was very pretty although she looked like Dissy. Poor Dissy was ill, the hardest kind of illness there is to cure, pity the mother whose child suffers this illness. The girl was smiling and said, "You see, I am well, Mother. I'm practically well, that's what I wanted you to know and now I can come home and take care of you."

The girl had stopped speaking for a moment. No, that would be too much, the voice must not cease, she needed the voice to speak to her. "Yes, what is it? What is it you're saying?" Mrs. Albany broke out suddenly. Even to her own ears her voice sounded harsh and croaking, she tried to smile, if the girl saw her smiling perhaps she would forgive her for sounding so harsh.

I have been so frightened, so much has happened and I am weary and tired, I cannot help it how I sound. She smiled so the girl would see, perhaps she would understand.

"Don't you see, Mother, I will come and take care of you. I have been a bad daughter, but now I will be good. I know I can be good all the time and you will be glad."

I only have one daughter and she is mad. You do not know how cruel it is to have a daughter who has gone mad. We will not speak of her. Her name is Eurydice, we called her Dissy, never mind, now she has no name. She smiled again at the girl.

"Yes."

"Yes, Mother, yes." Dissy looked into her dear mother's face, the crowded, fetid room vanished in her vision, and her mother smiled at her.

"You see, I'm better now . . . everything . . . so you and I can live together and if there is anything you want you will ask me and I will get it for you. Nothing will be bad any more, every-

thing will be nice. I have thought about it and thought about it. I know how everything will be. I have learned so much too. I can take care of you and I can take care of the house, so there won't be anyone, just you and me.

"I will wash the dishes and I will make the beds and I will cook and I will sew. We won't stay here. I will take you away from here where it's so dark and we will live in a little white house on a hill and there will be grass and trees. And I will take care of you. There will be a big tree next to the house. Yes. Yes."

The strange, wintry smile continued to play over the ruined, haggard features of the older woman. It was as though invisible cords attached to the corners of her mouth were irregularly twitched and pulled by a random hand. Her eyes brightened and she nodded her head sideways with the cadence of Dissy's words.

"And I will take care of you. There will be a garden and you and I will go and sit in the garden sometimes and listen to the birds singing. I will plant seeds so that the garden will be all ready when you want to walk out. We will sit on the bench together and then after, we will come in the house again and I will cook supper for us, and then after we will talk together or read or listen to the radio."

"Yes . . . yes . . . yes . . . yes . . ." Fantastically enough the old woman also could see the house, the trees, the garden, the grassy slope.

Dissy rushed on headlong. "You will choose a book and then I will choose a book, but I will choose one that I think you will like. Or I will play the piano for you. Yes, I can play the piano now a little and I have been practicing.

"Mother, oh Mother. Every day will be lovely and beautiful. Even when it rains and we have to sit inside, for we can look out the windows and see the leaves and flowers in the garden bowing down under the lovely rain."

Then at last the girl fell silent, but it was a vibrant, ecstatic silence. She was trembling now, muted and overwhelmed by the very passion that had forced her speech, with flushed cheeks and

shining eyes. Then she stood up to go to her mother and take her hand.

Mrs. Albany leaned her head against the back of her chair and closed her eyes. Her hand lay limp and loose in Dissy's; her hand was cold and bony, the girl's hot and dry.

"Mother, Mother," Dissy whispered.

"Yes . . . yes . . ."

Thus they remained a moment in time with clasped hands, the mother and the daughter in the dusty light of lamps, surrounded by the piles of furniture in the curtained dark, the animals restless close by, the ill, exhausted woman, the possessed girl, their hands touching; then Mrs. Albany opened her eyes and jerked her hand away.

"Dissy!"

"Yes."

"You are Dissy. You are my daughter, Dissy!"

"Yes, Mother, yes, I am Dissy."

"You're mad, you know, quite mad."

Dissy drew back.

"You're insane."

"No, I'm better," the girl said helplessly.

"Yes, you're quite insane. I can see that."

Mrs. Albany sat up stiffly in her chair clawing at the collar of her dress. "It's too tight, I can't breathe. But you're insane. I might have known it."

Dissy looked soberly at her mother, shook her head, reiterating,

"No, I'm better. You'll see, I'm better. I . . ."

"It's a trick. They sent you here."

"No, Mother. I came."

"He sent you."

"No, no!"

"He means to murder us both. He'll murder us both for the money."

"The money?" Dissy echoed in astonishment.

"Father's money, can't you see. He'll murder us for it."

"Father's money?"

"That's why you came?"

"What?"

"You came, you wanted money too. You thought you could come and take it away from me."

"No, no!"

"Yes, that's why you came. You poor insane little wretch, you thought I kept it here. You thought you could get it."

"No, Mother . . . really . . . Mother, that's in the letter too. I wrote about that in the letter. I wrote that I want you to have all of it. I don't want any of it."

"What?" Mrs. Albany had finally managed to unpin the brooch at her neck. "Ah, I thought I would choke."

"No, I mean I'm well and I don't need it." Suddenly she drew the purse from under her arm and started pulling at the zipper. "I've got something for you, Mother."

"She's mad, she's insane." Mrs. Albany looked around helplessly, she saw the girl pulling at her purse.

"No, no. When . . . you'll see what I have." The zipper had stuck. Dissy yanked at it as hard as she could, smiling strangely all the while and looking at her mother.

Mrs. Albany's face had hardened into a grim sternness. The black furrow reappeared between her brows and two black lines slanted downwards from her nose past her mouth, that tight shut and narrow and thin. The light had gone from her eyes, they were bloodshot and weary with a cynical, sneering gaze.

"It's gotten stuck, Mother. I mean the zipper is stuck."

In spite of herself Mrs. Albany leaned forward curiously. Dissy pulled and jerked at the zipper, smiling so confidently that it seemed indeed possible that the purse did contain some undeniable proof.

"Is it a letter, Dissy?" her mother asked finally. "I'm sorry, I mean . . . well . . . things . . . I mean I didn't mean to be unjust to you. You know that."

"That's quite all right. I understand, Mother."

"I know that he didn't send you. I know that you are kind and generous, Dissy. I didn't mean any of it what I said about Father's money."

"Yes, Mother, I know."

"Can't you get it open?"

"I will in a minute." She had worked it over, perhaps a half an inch. It was the handkerchief caught in the teeth that clogged it. "It's coming along."

"Is it a letter?"

Dissy stopped for a minute and looked up. Her hair had come loose and fell over the side of her face, she brushed it back with her hand, a completely unconscious, accustomed gesture. "No, I sent you the letter. But you didn't get it."

"I thought it was a letter from the doctor. Don't you have a letter from the doctor?"

Dissy laughed. "Oh no. Dr. Peter never writes letters." She had got her purse open at last, and now she stepped forward triumphantly and producing the two five dollar bills that the bus driver had given her, placed them gently on her mother's knee.

Mrs. Albany stared at the postage stamp sized packet, for Dissy had never unfolded it. "What . . . what is it?"

"It's money," Dissy explained delightedly, stepping back. "It's money for you."

"What?"

"I want you to have it, Mother."

Mrs. Albany stared at her completely bewildered. Only for a moment, then her face tightened with suspicion, "Where did you get it?"

"I . . . you see I'm better. It's mine. When we're better they let us have money to go to the movies or to have our hair done at the beauty parlour, or for whatever we want. People who are well always have money unless they're poor."

Mrs. Albany unfolded the bills and smoothed them out. "It's ten dollars. Did they give you ten dollars?"

"Oh no."

"Where did you get it?"

"I . . ." Dissy smiled happily. "A man gave it to me."

Mrs. Albany sat in silence with her hands in her lap over the bills, a look of horror came into her face, and then she looked sharply at Dissy. "What did you do?" her voice was almost inaudible "Oh you poor, crazy child, what have you done!"

Dissy was completely mystified. "Nothing, Mother. I haven't done anything. He . . . I found the money."

"That's not true, Dissy," Mrs. Albany said quietly.

"Yes, Mother, I . . ."

"Where did you get it?"

"I . . ."

"You stole it, then."

"Oh no."

"You're a thief and you stole it."

"No, no . . ."

"Tell me where you got it then."

"I told you . . . a man gave it to me."

Dissy's eyes filled with tears; she held her breath desperately, for if she started to cry, she could never stop. But this was worse than anything. It was worse than when her mother had looked so strange and talked so dryly, it was worse than all the dogs barking, and it was worse than when her Mother said she was insane, and said that she only came for Father's money, it was worse than all the things that had happened. Her mother was saying, "Tell me where you got it then!"

It was so hard to tell, it was so hard to explain. "I . . ." she looked away from her mother and around the room. She couldn't bear to look at her mother any more.

"Look at me, Dissy, and tell me the truth."

Dissy looked at her mother for one unbearable second and then away at all the piles of furniture, at the light cords and the lamps and the shadows and the dimness. Suddenly she caught sight of a little bureau that had used to stand in the corner of her room. It was painted a pale blue with gold trimmings, and little enamelled

rosebuds, pink and red. It was upside down now, on top of another bureau, and its feet stuck uselessly straight up in the air.

It looked very strange upside down like that, and sad too.

"Tell me where you got the money. Where did you get it?" Her mother was shouting at her angrily. She seemed to be very far away. Her mouth was opening and closing uttering furious words. But the tears in her eyes made it hard for her to look at her mother. But she could look at the little dresser that was upside down.

"Oh," she said. "No, no, no."

The old woman who was seated there wrapped up in silks and wools and blankets continued to scream about the money. What money was it? Oh that old money. Dissy frowned and tried to hold her breath. It was so silly about the old money. What was it that made her so sad that she wanted to cry?

"You stole the money, you stole the money!" Mrs. Albany shrieked hoarsely. "You're a thief. You always were a little thief. You and Maidie. You picked it up from her. Stealing."

It was the saddest thing that Dissy had ever seen, the little dresser upside down. It used to be in her room, and before that it used to be in Maidie's room. In Maidie's room in the corner, and Maidie used it to keep her clothes in. And now it was upside down.

"No," she said, "Maidie never stole anything."

"Don't be ridiculous. She was expelled from one school after another for stealing."

"No, it's not true. Maidie was . . ."

"Well, we needn't discuss it, I'm sure."

"No."

She could not bear to look at the little dresser that was upside down, and she saw why it was upside down. One of its legs was broken. It wasn't broken off entirely, but it was half-way pulled away from the chest.

The tears began running down her cheeks. She couldn't help it. Everything was so mixed up, and then suddenly she turned around and walked away. She didn't say goodbye to her mother,

or anything further; she merely went to the door, opened it and went out closing it behind herself. She walked very quickly down the steps and up the path to the gate. When she got there, she turned right, in the opposite direction from town, and went towards the dunes.

That's when she began to run, although she didn't really hear them shouting in the house or the dogs barking, or the parrot calling out, "Polly, Polly, hello Polly, Polly, Polly, Polly."

In his dream Miller was walking along a very narrow path in the forest. The trees were covered with Spanish moss and vines and there were thick bushes and briars that pressed in on the path so that sometimes he thought that the path was going to disappear completely and he wouldn't be able to go on. Actually, however, in spite of the thorny branches that stretched out toward him and the sticky tendrils of the vines he went on his way quite easily and if they touched him at all it was merely the gentle brush of spring grass against his skin.

He had gone down to the kitchen and Belinda was there. The only surprising thing was that the room was so dark and he wondered why she didn't turn on the light. He had said, "Belinda, I'm leaving now."

"Yes," she answered, "I suppose so. Goodbye." She spoke stiffly and unnaturally as a poor actor in a play.

"I was going to stay, but I've decided not to."

"Yes. Certainly there isn't any reason for you to stay." She still exaggerated the lines, speaking too loudly and clapping her voice too definitely at the end of the sentence.

"First I'm going to a funeral. It's David Albany who has died. Then I'm going down the path."

"Yes. Goodbye."

He was uncertain as he hurried down the path whether he was going to the funeral or whether he had already been and was

hurrying away. At first the path was broad and grassy, then it had narrowed as it went into the wood.

He realised it was a dream, and then not so much a dream as a projection of what he had meant to do. He had probably waked up, thinking and planning and then his sleepy mind had fastened upon an elaborate metaphor and turned it into a dream. He was aware that he was lying in bed and the sun was shining in at the window. It was hot and there were some flies in the room, also from below there were voices, Belinda's and other voices that he did not recognise.

"I'm Mrs. Hubert Trainer and this is Mr. Trainer," a woman was saying. Her voice was sharp and disagreeable. "We shall want two rooms and a bath if that would be at all possible."

Miller gazed listlessly out the window. He could see a shiny convertible standing in the street. Belinda's words were indistinct, but apparently she was telling them what the hotel had to offer. Miller felt vaguely resentful of these intruders then he grinned, what the hell, why leave poor Belinda tenantless, and he was leaving himself directly.

He finally got himself out of bed, though Lord knows what time it was. His watch said twenty-five minutes to seven which was so wildly improbable that he hadn't even bothered to find out whether it had stopped. He looked dolefully at the noonday sun and compared it to an obese and obscene bawd hanging yearning over its own reflection.

He showered and shaved meticulously taking a grim satisfaction in the fact that he was probably keeping the Trainers out of the bathroom. He scowled at himself in the mirror, his eyes were puffy and bloodshot with dark lines under them. He felt hot and bilious and when he returned to his room he rediscovered that all his shirts were dirty, so he put on the poinsettia print jobby of the evening before as the cleanest of the lot.

The letter from Dissy still remained on the little table beside his bed, he had decided to burn it and never read it again. First he fixed himself a drink in the toothbrush glass which was under his

bed. He had had so many that the toothpaste taste was almost gone.

Outside his window was a wide stone ledge that would do as a makeshift hearth. He brought Dissy's letter there and page by page he burned it up. He did not read any of it. Then he blew on the black remnants and ashes and watched them scatter down on the sand below. Once he looked up and down the almost deserted street and thought, she will come here and I should stay and look for her but where could I look in a treeless town for a girl who thinks she is a leaf. One charred piece of paper remained on the ledge, he crumbled it in his fingers and dropped it over the side, then he finished his drink.

As he started down the stairs he glanced at his watch again, mechanically. Twenty-five minutes to seven. Superstitiously he did not test to see if he had forgotten to wind it or whether the sea water had gotten into the works after all.

A sudden embarrassment overwhelmed him when he greeted Belinda which made him stiff which made him even more embarrassed. He turned toward her eyes that were blank and oblivious.

Belinda had taken particular pains on her person that morning and she was looking unusually pretty. She had put on brilliant white sailcloth shorts and a striped Italian porter's jacket. Her bare legs, though a little on the sinewy side, still were neat and trim. She had covered her hair with a fresh bandana, a brilliant green one that went well with her dark complexion and matched the stripes in her blouse. Bangles jingled on her arm. She took in at a glance his embarrassment and his obliviousness, she smiled a little ruefully, shrugged and offered to fix him breakfast.

Miller wasn't as oblivious as he seemed. He sat down at the kitchen table with diffidence. He had acted atrociously and he knew it, but he was touched and reassured by Belinda's jaunty manner.

She raised her eyes and smiling comically said, "Guesties. Guess what? We've got guesties."

"Yeah, I saw them already."

"Darling, adorable, little guesties. Mink coat, matched pearls, Cadillac convertible guesties."

Miller smiled and sipped at the coffee she had placed before him.

"The Oceanside as a caravansary doesn't have quite the style to which they are accustomed." She laughed, "Wait till they find out that you used up all the hot water. In fact, I think you would agree with me these two don't quite fit in this little community of high thinkers and plain if cirrhotic livers."

Miller continued to smile. He was only half listening. The windows were open and the soft air blew in, also the flies. A little squadron of them were zooming in irregular ellipses around the light string, a few more buzzed against the upper part of the window. Miller stared past them out at the placid sea.

He was recalled with a start. Something. What had Belinda been saying . . . about the new people . . . something. He looked at her and she was staring back at him, every trace of jauntiness and gaiety had gone from her face. It wasn't that that had shocked him. She was speaking slowly.

"I told them that your name was Ed Miller. That's the name you registered under."

She watched him closely. He paled; the days on the beach had given him a patchy burn on his nose and forehead and cheekbones, now these areas stood out sorely against the whitened skin where the blood drained away, the hollows under his eyes darkened, he drew his brows together.

"Who wants to know?" he asked abruptly.

"The Tandys. They live here in town. They were looking for a man named Albany. David Albany. Naturally I told them that you were Ed Miller."

Suddenly she was so angry that she was close to tears, anyway she was close to tears and she was angry. She raised her voice slightly.

"Well," she was telling him furiously, "you don't have to give your real name at a place like this. When you've been in the hotel

business as long as I have, you find that nine people out of ten don't. We just keep the records to have something to point to . . ."

She stopped short recollecting herself. She was opposite a sad young man, doubly forlorn in a Hawaiian print sports shirt, who was trying to down a cup of stone cold coffee, he was at least ten years her junior and he was muttering unhappily, "I'm sorry, Belinda . . ."

"Let me warm up your coffee for you," she said at last.

"Okay," he answered listlessly.

Belinda fetched the Silex from the stove; while she was up she adjusted the window so that the flies would escape and cease their infernal buzzing. Actually, however, by the time she returned to the table, others had got themselves trapped in another part of the window.

"About this David Albany," she said matter-of-factly, "It's family troubles, I take it."

Family troubles indeed. Of course it endlessly came back to that and all other troubles eliminated themselves automatically. Miller passively let her refill his cup, he noticed the way she stood beside him, relaxed and lithe and tall, pouring without looking from the little pursed lip of glass into his cup. "I gathered from what Edna Tandy said that you'd call it family troubles"

Call it that, family troubles, since the world began, the perpetrator of human ills, carrier and host of the evil that began with Adam's progeny, so as we each are, we suckle such trouble with mother's milk and smear with that wormwood the teat we give our children; we had better be as fish in the flood, spawned in the deep and nurtured by the neutral waves.

Miller was aware of cigarette smoke in the room, somewhat fetid floating upon the fresh ocean air that wafted soberly through the open window, and also the smell of the stove, of gas and heated metal. He looked into the brimming cup of coffee. He didn't *have* to drink it.

Belinda put the Silex back on the stove then sat down opposite

him. "Well," she said lighting a cigarette, "If you want you can tell Auntie Belinda all about it."

His troubled eyes met hers. "I'm clearing out. Right after breakfast, in a few minutes now. I'm taking the first bus out of here."

"Yes," she answered soothingly. "That's right. Northbound or southbound, if I may ask?"

"Whichever one's first."

She looked elaborately at her watch. "The one going north leaves in about five minutes. You'd never make it. The other goes through around four thirty."

"I'll take that one. I was going south anyway. I'm going to Mexico." She looked at him peculiarly. "Say, how come you know about bus schedules. You didn't last night he asked."

"I telephoned this morning and found out." She paused and looked away. "If you're going to be in Mexico, give my love to Sanborns and don't drink the water unless it's boiled."

Honest-to-God sweet Belinda. She didn't know him from Adam or what he had done or what he had failed to do, but she'd found out the bus schedules for him and she'd deny it to her dying day that this was David Albany, if he wanted. "You're wrong, sister, this isn't David Albany, this is Ed Miller. We were kids together, grew up on the same block, we used to play out in the sand lot behind Shea's Department Store . . ." (Let it pass that Belinda was probably ripely going to high school when he was born.) She'd say anything, if he wanted.

Also she was plain and not too bright and tough and rather dull, but she had sense and in one second she could do more to help, to save, in her was faith and loyalty, and charity and hope; love more in a second than he in a thousand years.

"Seriously," she said, "I have a friend who's staying in Cuernavaca, I'll give you her address."

He noticed that his hand was trembling when he stirred his coffee, he watched it until it steadied. "Look," he said in a choked

voice, "Did those people who asked for David Albany say anything else?"

"Ye-es," she hesitated slightly. "Jack Tandy's ma works for a Mrs. Albany who lives down the beach a ways. David's her son or something. Anyways the old lady got it in her head that he's going to murder her. She saw him last night. She's turned her house into a fortress and she's sitting there in wait for him armed with a pistol."

Miller didn't smile, in fact he felt cold and slightly nauseated, he lacked for air and suddenly the kitchen darkened just as it had been in his dream and he recalled his dream and hurrying over the tumbled, dusty grass towards the narrow overgrown path through the forest, the tearing branches and thorns and the entangling weeds.

For it had been in his mind, always, not merely the night before nor merely in the vapourings of alcohol and debauch, but there sober or not, rooted in the dark places of his soul, its solid trunk rising through his being, the dark circle of its branches cast a shade over his whole life, shadow and blight of this ultimate destruction and humiliation and indignity To send this woman to hell, to complete his own damnation. Perhaps he was a coward merely, so he fled through the forest and the thorn trees touched him gently, softly as spring grass.

He clutched the side of the table till the blood was driven from his fingers and his nails seemed ready to burst with pain. Then he forced himself to smile. "It's a damn good thing I'm getting out of this town, then."

Belinda watched him soberly. His eyes had lightened now and emptied of expression. "Four thirty this aft. noon won't be one second too soon," he added raising his voice.

"There's something else," said Belinda finally.

"Yes," he said woodenly.

"There's a daughter. Mrs. Albany has a daughter who's funny, you know, in the head and she's locked up. Well, she's escaped."

"Yes."

"They think she's here. They're looking for her here."

"Who?"

"The police, everybody. She's supposed to be dangerous."

"She wouldn't be dangerous," Miller said slowly. He got to his feet and stood vaguely staring out the window at the sea. He had his hands in his pockets and he bulged them into fists jiggling the change or keys or whatever he had in them. Belinda observing thought irrelevantly, that's the way men get their pockets all out of shape.

"It's been on the radio and last night some people thought they saw her at the Hi-Way Diner."

"Yes." He turned his head away as though he were listening for sounds elsewhere in the house. His glance swept over the room and fell on the radio perched on top of the refrigerator. It was the small set from the living room which Belinda carried around and plugged in wherever she happened to be.

Belinda followed his look. "Shall I turn it on, maybe there will be more news."

"No." He lifted his hand to his face as though shading his eyes.

"Never mind, it doesn't matter."

The Trainers were coming down the stairs now. There was the hard clack-clack of the woman's high heels sounding hollowly on the bare wood. Mr. Trainer followed with squeaking leather sounds from his shoes.

Miller turned hurriedly to Belinda. "Don't despise me, Belinda, she's my sister and there's not one thing on God's green earth that I can do to help."

Belinda was standing close to him looking up, suddenly she knocked lightly against his chest with her knuckles, an odd, awkward, noncommittal gesture of farewell. For a moment she didn't trust herself to speak. Her face had become a stiff mask of hopelessness and passionate pity, and a desperate, selfless grief.

"Pity her," she said at last.

"God knows I pity her."

"And pity her mother too."

"No, I cannot, I will not . . . she has no right to it, she doesn't deserve it . . ."

He remained an eternity upon that beach, struggling through the loose, trampled sand beside the dark sea until he came to the place where the old woman sat who called out, "Young man! Young man!"

The parrot cried out, "Young man! Young man!"

The ghost human voice, "Young man! Young man!"

He looked her in the face.

There was absolutely nothing in this aged, wasted old woman's countenance that remotely resembled anything he remembered, not one trace to remind him of that other; the light was poor, all he could see were knobby prominences and hollows; the light was clear enough so he could see the marks and harrowings of the thousands of minute lines that crisscrossed her face.

He had expected her to age, of course, but he had not expected her eyebrows to thin and whiten, and whitening, seemingly disappear, leaving her eyes unshaded and oddly vulnerable, beneath them the solidness of cheek and bone seemed to have disintegrated, in time's erosion, the hollows were elongated into channels that extended almost to her chin as though fretted there by tears. Her mouth had shrunk and her forehead bulged and peaked, her nose was enlarged, and now her eyes under heavy lids disappeared into mere slits of dull gleaming.

The face let him look at it unflinchingly, aware of its own ugliness, defiant to the end, anomalous that this face yet retains this perverse awareness of its own aspect. She pushed away the letter that she could not bear to read from her only daughter who was mad.

Miller heard her saying, "No, David Albany . . . I don't know what's become of him . . . but thank you very much."

He saw her glance away from his face, a weird sliding sideways away from him, recognition and remembrance came to him in that oddly shifting gaze, he thought he saw what had been instantly illuminated, for he had seen the familiar, which he had

missed before, now it returned, as the eyes moved away from him, oddly a little meanness there, contempt and hatred.

Vanished. The glance moved on to the letter in his hand, and the face seemed about to shatter and crumble like a face desecrated in the smoke and dust of a blast, bloomed from the inward bursting outward, it remains but the fractional part of a second it takes to flash upon the eye.

"Goodbye," she called to him, "thank you, young man, again."

"Yes, I pity her," he said savagely, "I pity her."

He turned and stumbled up the dark stairs to his room to pack his bag and go.

"Dissy, Dissy!" Mrs. Albany called out mechanically. She stiffened each time she emitted the cry and stretched her neck forward. "Dissy, Dissy, you come back!" Her dry, hard voice scarcely carried across the room. "Dissy!" Wooden faced, robot jerkings of her body, her hands flew upwards and then hit down at the arms of her chair in a machine sequence. But there was anguish and desperation and anger also in the cries she uttered. "Dissy, Dissy, Dissy!"

The dogs were barking again and Mrs. Tandy had gone out on the porch; she too was shouting, "Come back, Miss Dissy. Please come back. Miss Dissy, Miss Dissy!"

Poor Dissy, poor Dissy, poor child, poor child. Mrs. Albany's face suddenly convulsed and twisted. My poor little daughter. Oh my poor child! Poor, poor, poor!

Outside Mrs. Tandy continued to call, "Please come back, Miss Dissy, please come back."

Poor girl, poor girl, she will never come back. Not in the wide world, ever come back.

Mrs. Tandy returned and stood beside her mistress. "Missus, she ran away in the dunes, she wouldn't come back when I called, she wouldn't even turn around."

"Oh, she'll come back," Mrs. Albany answered sharply. "You

can count on it, she'll be back pretty soon and wanting to come in."

"Like she was deaf and never heard me calling at all. She ran out into the dunes fast as though the devil was after her, never once turning around though I called and called, Missus."

"She'll be coming back, all right."

Just the same Mrs. Albany was filled with the desperate knowledge that her daughter would never come back. Poor child, poor, misguided, crazy girl, what will become of her, what will become of her? What will become of all of us? All? There is no "all of us." There are only two, and each is separate and alone. An old woman, sick and crippled and abandoned, unable to move from her chair, and the poor, mad girl running out in the dunes. Running and running, clumsy, floundering in the loose sand, it fills her shoes and she falls down, struggles to her feet again and up the blinding slope. What will become of you? What will become of me? What will become of each of us?

Her glance fell on the two five dollar bills still on her lap and she swept them irritably to the floor. Thief. She stole the money and she lied. It is hard to forgive stealing and lying. One can forgive madness but it is harder to forgive stealing and lying.

Mrs. Albany folded her hands in her lap and tried to listen to what Mrs. Tandy was saying.

"I'll phone up John Everett, Missus."

"What . . . what's that?"

"I'm calling up John Everett on the telephone, Missus."

"Yes, Mrs. Tandy, I heard you. What . . . I mean whatever for?"

Mrs. Tandy had left the door open on the porch and the daylight and the sweet air penetrated into the room. Mrs. Albany twisted in her chair to look suspiciously towards the door. She could see a slope of sand and a "V" of ocean water and the sky.

"I mean why should you want to call John Everett?"

"He could help, Missus. Help us, I mean."

Help—that stupid, bungling fellow! What was the housekeeper

thinking of. The house, perhaps. The house was very disorderly, she could see that well enough. All the furniture had been moved around last night and by and by it would have to be moved back. Well. That could wait, after all. It could certainly wait.

"Don't worry about it, Mrs. Tandy, the furniture can wait till later."

"Oh Missus . . . I mean about the young lady, Miss Dissy, Missus. He could go out after her. A man, I mean, can sort of help like that getting her to come back."

That poor, crazy girl will never come back.

"Oh, she'll come back of her own accord, Mrs. Tandy. I'm sure of that."

She pressed the palms of her hands together, repeated softly, "I'm perfectly sure."

"But I'll call up John Everett and he and Edna can sort of be on the lookout for her."

"No, no. Don't bother them. Poor girl, poor girl. She'll be coming back here to be sure."

"Missus, I'd feel better if I called them."

The two women looked at each other stubbornly, but this time, Mrs. Albany easily had the upper hand. "I'd feel a whole lot better, Missus, if I was to call John Everett." Mrs. Tandy spoke slowly and rather loudly.

"No, no, Annie, let's not be bothering people." Mrs. Albany answered brightly, almost merrily. A moment later she cocked her head to one side and lifting her finger to her mouth in an exaggerated gesture of harkening, "Listen, Annie, I think I hear the water boiling for that coffee you were talking about."

She nodded her head a couple of times. "I certainly do hear it and look, there is the steam rising up."

Her smile was queer and wheedling and Mrs. Tandy noticed a wreathing paleness around her lips that meant that Mrs. Albany was in pain. Never a word about it, instead, merely a broad wink and the playful remark, "Look at poor Mr. Poco, he's still got the

cover on his cage. Mrs. Tandy do pull it off and then make us some coffee."

The pain had come upon Mrs. Albany suddenly. She had been saying, "No, Annie, let's not be bothering people," when she found herself all at once in the grip of a diligent, all pervasive agony, hurting back, limbs, chest, throat, head; she was seized with dizziness and nausea, but all the while she kept on smiling and talking of the coffee and Mr. Poco: "Poor Mr. Poco, for all he knows it's the middle of the night."

Poor, poor, poor Dissy. Crazy, mad girl. She won't come back, she won't come back, ever, at all. Most probably her heart is broken.

Mrs. Tandy backed away, "Shall I get you some of your medicine, Missus?"

"Yes, if you will. That's just what I need. And bring the coffee and take the cloth off Mr. Poco. Yes, yes. Mrs. Tandy, don't you be worrying about Dissy. She always was a wild one to run away, but she'd always come back by and by."

She bowed her head still smiling, repeating silently to herself the vain reassurance, she always was a wild one to run away, but she'd always come back by and by. She'll come back, there's no doubt of it. Knowing that the opposite was true, smiled grimly, denied the truth. She folded her hands and let the weariness and pain possess her completely, jogging the worry from her mind.

Then Mrs. Tandy was standing beside her with a glass of water and a white, round pill, both on a clean doily on a little silver tray. Mrs. Albany looked appreciatively at the pretty offering and then up into the kindly, softly frowning, dumpling face above.

"Oh . . . oh thank you, Mrs. Tandy. I am so grateful." Her glance returned to the shining silver and the bit of pretty lace, as a child's might, but she made no move to take the water or the pill.

"The coffee will be ready in a minute, Missus."

"That's good, that's good," Mrs. Albany murmured. "I should like a good cup of coffee." Still her attention was fixed upon the

tray, regarded solemnly the pill bisected in the middle by an indented line, at the glass with its etchings of grapes and vine leaves.

"Take the pill, Missus, and drink the water." Mrs. Tandy spoke gently and moved the tray a little.

"Yes, Mrs. Tandy. Yes, of course."

So she moved at last, breaking that small instant spell that the shining silver and liquid and the white lace doily had cast upon her; she swallowed the pill and drank a little of the water to wash it down.

"Mrs. Tandy," she was saying suddenly. "We never think, do we, when our children are little that when they're grown up that we will be old."

She lifted her hands helplessly as though she held in them all this, her unlovely old age, the disordered room, her fears, her disappointed hopes. "We never think of it at all, do we?" Her voice sank to a whisper, and she looked searchingly around at the piles of furniture, at the snarl of electric cords and the still lighted lamps, finally at the parrot, the cloth newly removed from his cage; he returned her gaze with aged, wise uncomprehending eyes.

"No," Mrs. Tandy said briskly. "I don't guess anybody ever does think about it much."

Mrs. Albany's face twisted convulsively. "Poor little Dissy."

"Oh Missus, please let me call up John Everett!"

"No."

"Missus, I know he could help find her."

"No, I tell you, no. I don't want you to call anyone."

The dogs watched with pricked up ears and the parrot watched turning his head sideways to catch the view first with one eye, then with the other. It was Mrs. Tandy who turned away and sighed.

"Besides," Mrs. Albany added woodenly, "She'll be coming back of her own accord. I'm positive about that."

Dissy has gone and she will never come back.

Dissy has struggled to the top of the ridge of dunes and has

found herself in a long oval sandy hollow. She is panting and her side hurts cruelly. No one ever comes here; here there are only the rib marks of the wind and the cross stitch lines of bird tracks. She had left a wide, botched trail of tumbled sand, for her feet dragged as she ran; it shows where she fell and where she had got up again, it cuts down the side of the hollow and leads up to where she lies with her elbows digging into the sand and her hands pressed against her ears. The sun shines softly upon that child-blond head, dazzles shut her eyes so it seems she sleeps, naps here in the sun, except that her eyelids flutter ever so slightly and the long curling lashes are darkened with tears.

Poor little Dissy, but she'll come back of her own accord, that's for sure.

Mrs. Albany cradled her arms and looked down with a remote echo of tenderness for the child who once had lain there, it seemed, for once more her thoughts fled backwards in time, wandered into a sunny room where a young woman sat up in bed and looked at her reflection in the tall pier glass. She stretched and pushed her heavy hair back on her shoulders, and still watching herself in the mirror took from the nurse's arms the tiny infant. She looked down then into the wrinkled, frowning face. "She looks old and wise, but she's not very pretty, is she?"

"She's got a sweet temper, Ma'am."

The child's hand closed about the tip of her little finger. The mother made a moue with her lips and brushed them against the child's damp forehead. Suddenly it was the bitter old woman who looked at darkness and dust: she raked back savagely the wispy grey hair that fell in strands over her knotted brow; a vein stood out at her temple, and she cried out in a loud voice, "She'll come back, I tell you."

"Yes, Missus, all right, Missus."

She's almost the age that I was then, and I never thought how it would be. And if she had been torn from my breast at that moment and crushed to death before my eyes, it would have been better than this. Mrs. Albany leaned down and took up the

two five dollar bills that she had pushed to the floor. She held them, one in each hand and raised her head.

"Mrs. Tandy, I think the coffee must have dripped through by now. I think I should like a cup of coffee."

The pill was having its effect. The pain that was so constant in her seemed to have drawn behind a curtain, it was present still, but its being was out of sight, sensed rather than felt, also there was a subsidiary effect of the medicine, the ends of her fingers and her nose and ears tingled with an odd warmth.

"Yes, I should like a cup of coffee to drink, and then perhaps you will raise the shades. It's foolish to have all these lights on, it's daylight now. I should be very grateful if you would bring me some coffee. Yes. I'd like a cup of coffee now, very much. Yes. Yes, that I would like very much."

Then she was drinking the coffee; it was hardly more than hot water coloured brown with cream and sugar added, for she could no longer drink strong coffee; but it was hot and Mrs. Tandy had fixed it in a white eggshell porcelain cup; Mrs. Albany looked at the diffuse dim light that gleamed dully through the translucent china as she sipped.

Mrs. Tandy went around the room raising the shades and opening the windows; next she conscientiously switched off each of the lamps; all of this before she returned to the stove to fetch a cup of coffee for herself, which she drank standing up near one of the front windows staring out all the while anxiously towards the dunes.

"Mrs. Tandy!" Mrs. Albany spoke suddenly, sharply.

"Yes, Missus?"

"Have you ever known anybody to come when you were watching for them?"

"What Missus? Oh, maybe not, Missus." She smiled good naturedly and continued looking out the window.

"Well, I wish you wouldn't." Mrs. Albany said irritably.

"I don't guess it does any harm, Missus."

"There are better things to do."

Well, well, yes that's so, of course, to be sure and Annie Tandy knows it well enough, and she stands there racking her brains trying to think how to get the Missus to let her put a call through to John Everett and Edna. She glanced over her shoulder at that one, so stiff and straight in her chair with a black look on her face, her mouth shut like a cat's mouth and the lines running down to her chin.

The flies that were everywhere that day found Dissy lying in the hollow among the dunes. They buzzed unmercifully around her head and crawled stinging on her bare legs. She flayed about her helplessly trying to drive them away and finally got to her feet again to struggle on through the soft sand, for the flies bothered her less when she was in motion.

Without realising it, she changed her direction and turning her back on the sea she floundered over the ridge of dunes toward the highway. The sand on the slopes was softer even than it was in the hollow; here she sank in deeper than her ankles at every step she took, dislodging the sand above, that poured down against her legs in miniature, dry slides. First she lost one shoe and then the other, but she did not trouble to look for them.

Mrs. Albany had emptied the cup: she sat peering into it, blinking a little, regarding the flaring brown ring at the bottom and the undissolved sugar that remained, gritty and granular. She had placed the cup and saucer in the exact centre of the lace doily which in turn was in the centre of the silver tray.

"She'll come back. It will be a little while, of course, but she'll come back." Mrs. Albany muttered to herself, nodding her head.

"What's that, Missus?"

"What?"

"I thought you said something, Missus."

"Oh . . . well, no . . . I just thought of something, Annie."

"Yes, Missus?"

But instead of answering, Mrs. Albany turned away evasively and smiled. Mrs. Tandy watched her uneasily; it was a weird, completely incongruous expression that had come into her face;

it was the eager, expectant look of one who has heard a bird call and waits for it to call again.

Indeed so compelling was her attitude of harkening, that Mrs. Tandy too began to strain her ears to catch any sound. The dog breathing, the ocean racketing, the wind in the electrical wire attached to the outside of the house near the window where she stood, an automobile passing on the highway, only these, ordinary sounds, then a faint buzzing, she became aware of the whirring buzzing of flies in the room. The warm weather, of course, had brought them out. Well. She opened her mouth to hear better and she heard the hunger rumblings in her own stomach.

"What is it, Missus?"

Mrs. Albany was looking obliquely across the room towards the corner that held her bed and her other belongings that she customarily used, over the head of the bed, at the wall, at the large, daily wall calendar that hung there, at the big block numeral "18," the date of the day before.

"You forgot to tear off the day, Mrs. Tandy."

As if this were any day, as if this were an ordinary negligence.

"Oh yes, so I did, Missus."

As she said every day. Then, "I'll do it now, Missus." She hurried across the room and reaching up tore down the page, crumpled it in her hand. But she had made a mistake and torn off two pages at once; instead of the expected "19," a fat, red "20" appeared.

"I'm sorry, Missus." Mrs. Tandy looked guiltily at the crumpled sheets in her hand. She had made the mistake before and knew there was no remedying it.

"I'm sorry too, Mrs. Tandy."

Then abruptly, "No, I'm not sorry, Annie, I'm not sorry at all." Her voice was oddly ringing and fresh. "It really doesn't matter. In fact . . . it seems like more than just one day since yesterday . . ." She spoke very quickly. ". . . in fact, I wish the day were over . . ."

She doubled her hands up suddenly into fists and her head

Jerked stiffly forward, her chin against her chest; she held that rigid pose in silence, trembling a little with strain, so that the shawl slipped back from her hair, leaving all at once that bowed head bared, the undressed streaked hair hung down in witchlike strands over her face.

Dissy will not come back, she will never return; no one ever does; they go out further and further, like a tide that has no turning, leaving a stinking, ruined land behind. It is this way with everyone that I have ever loved.

Mrs. Tandy was standing beside her gently patting her shoulder.

"There, Missus, you'll see, everything will come out all right."

"Yes, of course." Mrs. Albany managed at length to speak, a croaking, half whispered sound, "Yes, of course."

"How would you like it, Missus, if I fixed some breakfast? I think we both need some breakfast, and we'd both feel a whole lot different."

"... yes, Mrs. Tandy ..."

"Wouldn't you like to wash up and things, first, Missus?"

"... yes ... Mrs. Tandy ..."

"Sure, of course, you want to, Missus."

"... yes ..."

Mrs. Albany resigned herself like a child into the housekeeper's capable hands, deriving indeed a kind of strange pleasure from her own helplessness. She let Mrs. Tandy lift her and set her down, limp and relaxed now and unthinking; submissively stretching out her hands for Mrs. Tandy to wash with a rag, and dry, too worn and weary to attempt even these small offices herself; she let the other brush her hair and plait it into two thin braids, and even at last consented to leaving her chair and lying down in bed.

Mrs. Tandy with a sure instinct to comfort and soothe, talked and talked the whole while, inconsequentials, anything that came to her head, running on, words the stream of them, meaningless in themselves, but communicating as a lullaby reassurance and peace.

Her stomach rumbled and she said, "It sounds like an old rail-

road train inside of me, it does, Missus. Hungry I am, starving. You know what, Missus, I never did get through dinner last night. I was just settin' down to a nice dish of kidneys when the phone rang.

"Oh the way I cook kidneys, Missus, it makes the water run out of your mouth. Now I know it, Missus, you don't fancy kidneys yourself, but one day, Missus, I'm going to fix them for you."

"I brown them in butter first and then stew them for a bit, not long, mind you, cause it makes them get tough, ten minutes or so, maybe, and never let the juice boil and then put in a sup of wine. That's the secret, Missus, if you want to know. And those kidneys I was settin' down to, they were veal kidneys, so young and round and tender, why I don't think that the calf had used 'em more than a couple of times hisself. And I'd just popped one in my mouth when the telephone rings."

Mrs. Albany was lying now stiffly in her bed, her eyes half open had a dead, green look fixed passively upon the housekeeper. Mrs. Tandy was thinking again of broaching the subject of calling her son, so she laboured the subject of telephones now.

"John Everett, he answered the telephone you know, saying 'Hello, hello, hello' like the connection wasn't any good. We all just sat there with our mouths open listening to John Everett sayin' 'Hello, hello, hello' into the telephone.

"Then Edna said, 'Maybe it's for me, John.' And so he gives it to her and all the time I'm listening and never taking another bite, though those kidneys were like little plums in your mouth, believe me, but I just sat there holding up my fork listening to Edna saying into the telephone, 'yes, yes, yes, oh yes, uh huh, oh no, oh goodness gracious,' till I thought I was just going to die from not knowing what was going on. Have you ever noticed it, Missus, how if you listen to somebody talk on the telephone how they always say 'yes, yes, yes, and no, no, no' and you never can tell what they're talking about?"

"By the way, Missus, I'll be wanting to make a phone call my-

self, by and by after I get you fixed up with breakfast and everything, if you don't mind."

"No," said Mrs. Albany. The stubbornness never left her though she appeared to be so completely submissive and inert, "No," a distant and remote iteration of her will.

"Well, we'll see about that." Mrs. Tandy was unperturbed. "We'll see about it by and by. But first we want to get some breakfast into us, don't we? How would you like a nice poached egg, and I have some English muffins there and some strawberry jam. You'd like that, Missus, I know you would. Now you just keep quiet here and get you a little rest, and I'll be fixing us some breakfast.

"And look at Mr. Poco, he wants some breakfast too . . ."

Talking and talking and never ceasing from talking, she backed away from the bed in the alcove and threading her way through the disarranged furniture, made her way to the cookstove, where at last she judged that she could desist from her chattering. She fell silent, and keeping a sharp lookout through the window that gave on the dunes, she set to work fixing breakfast.

Actually it was several hours before Mrs. Albany roused again. Mrs. Tandy did not disturb her. She brought the tray quietly and as quietly withdrew. Mrs. Albany was aware of her coming but she was stilled in a deathly repose that she could not rise from or shake off, to awake, to smile falsely to cover her grief, she could not seek to do, she lay unmoving and only when the other had retired, opened her eyes momentarily to watch in stealth lest the other make a move towards the telephone. But Mrs. Tandy did not. She sighed and ate the breakfast she had fixed and remained sitting near the window keeping watch.

She's gone and she won't come back, Mrs. Tandy.

Who has ever come when you watch for them?

You can watch and wait and no one ever comes. And nothing ever comes. You can spend your whole life watching and waiting and nothing ever comes of it.

Annie, I waited. I waited a long time and I watched a long time. Sometimes I was patient and sometimes I was impatient, but I waited and watched always. It was when I was young that I waited so. When Stephen came I thought it was he that I had waited for, I was young and a fool, that's why I thought it was he and also I had waited so long. I waited because I was ambitious and when Stephen came I found I had to wait and watch again to learn to know. I had to wait to be accepted, I had to wait for friends and invitations and I had to wait for my husband's love and to prove his love I destroyed my child and I sacrificed his love. I had waited and waited and in the end I had nothing.

Nothing that fills so many boxes and trunks and crates and barrels and drawers and rooms and warehouses. Nothing that gathers dust, that rots and decays, that rusts, that tarnishes, that tears, that mildews, that warps and fades, is eaten by moths, by worms, passed by by fashion, and corrupted by the air. Nothing that needs must be hoarded to the end for everything else is gone, only sad dreams can bring it back shrouded in the gloom of hate and guilt and despair.

Remembered not only in the dream but endlessly recalled and recreated as if in atonement, a penance to be paid and repaid in the suffering of reliving.

Stephen did not love me. Stephen never loved me. Not when he wooed me or married me, though I was beautiful and young and sweet, he never loved me. He loved only himself and the woman who had died and her children and all he wanted of me was to be their mother. As if I could be a mother without being a wife or a wife without being loved. I waited for his love and I watched but he merely loved me less and less.

But the young woman had had one comfort in the years in the desert of lovelessness: she had the power to make her husband do whatever she wished, it was this power that she used idly at first, then wickedly, maliciously, she made him turn on his children, on Maidie, on David and at last on her own.

Surely this was explanation for what had happened that night,

the passion that was released, the calamity that followed, she insisted on a principle and he had acquiesced according to the same, actors in a pantomime, gesturing blindly and without comprehension. Remembered not because what happened was remarkable but because of what happened later, memory that is no longer the imprint of blind motion through experience, but the recreation of event, now I remember, now I see. First she recalled it uneasily, ashamed of her own indifference, mollified her sense of guilt with I didn't know, I didn't realise that Dissy was so sick, blamed Stephen, he was a doctor, he knew and he was indifferent, more indifferent than I; then the same incident is recalled in a few years time, I was a blind fool not to realise that Stephen and Josette even then, yes I remember perfectly well, I can see perfectly well, what a ridiculous, blind fool I was, I still had faith, I was pure and innocent, how could I imagine such sordidness and perfidy. Now an old woman who lies narrowly in her bed as one who's died, thrice dead with fear and despair and grief, calls up the incident, I sought to test my power I sought to test his love.

Merely, one evening while Jessica was dressing to go to the opera and later to a supper party. Stephen had come to her worried, "Dissy's running a temperature."

Oh yes, oh really, what then?

She was sitting on the low padded seat in front of the triple mirror looking at herself in the glass. A beautiful and distinguished young woman gazed back at her, a second woman looked aside with her neck stretched up in a lovely line, a third, opposite the second, lifted her profile proudly.

"No, Josette, the petticoat with Honiton lace." It pleased her to have the pretty little maid hurrying between the chiffonier and the clothes closet, fetching for her.

"Josette help me on with my stockings." She stretched out her handsome legs while the little maid stooped drawing up the thin silk.

Josette slipped the dress over her head and Jessica scolded that it had disarrayed her hair. She held her head still while Josette

repaired the damage and looked at the dress in the glass. The neckline dropped low, revealingly over her shapely breasts, two diamond clips gathered the ice blue silk at her shoulders.

Stephen knocked on the door, "Come in," she said, she blushed for she was not dressed, she was modestly attired, but she was not dressed. She looked at his shadow on the floor, dumpy and short from the overhead light, though Stephen was quite tall, her embarrassment faded as she looked at the dwarf shadow of her beautiful Stephen.

He put his hands on her shoulders. She could see it in the mirror, just his hands, rather wide across the palms with straight, strong fingers.

"Josette, bring me my pearls."

What had happened to the girl! She was standing in a trance over by the bureau, her face turned away. "Josette!" she repeated, raising her voice.

"I'm worried about Dissy," he said.

"What?"

"She's running a temperature."

"Oh, I know," she answered airily, "They told me about it." She looked at her husband coolly, "Children are always running temperatures."

"Ummmmmmm."

He was a doctor, he ought to know. "Children have fevers if you look at them cross-eyed," she said indifferently. She turned clear around and faced Josette, "Well, can't you find my pearls?"

"Yes, Madame."

"Well, don't worry about Dissy. Frau Schmidt can look after her perfectly well. She ought to, we pay her enough." She fastened the pearls about her neck. Then she moved across the room and Josette held out her wrap.

Their child's life hung, perhaps, in the balance, but all the woman was aware of at that moment was a curious consciousness of her walk and the controlled grace of her movements, taking pleasure just as a dancer does in the very motion, proud and con-

fidest in her youth and beauty. She turns to him, the light falls on her shining hair and as she tips her face to his, it plays a pretty trick over the subtle curve of her cheeks and the little pointed chin, the blue eyes suddenly ablaze, fierce and compelling, "Well, Stephen, are you ready to go?"

"Well, yes . . ." he was saying, "well, yes, all right, Jessica I'll do what you want, we'll go, I'm ready to go."

They look down on Josette—no wonder the little maid holds herself so straight and stiff, short and dumpy she is, and dark and swarthy, the dainty cap perches on hair as coarse as wire, suddenly her features are all awry, she stands crookedly behind them in the narrow passageway.

"Dr. Albany," she says softly, "I'll go and sit with the little girl. She likes me, I think."

"No, Josette, that won't be necessary," Jessica answered quickly.

"Yes, she does like you, Josette. That would be very kind of you Josette."

Oh the crafty little minx, all the while she never looked up once, subservient, unobtrusive, humble. To meet them later in the exact same pose, eyes lowered, head tipped down, self-effacing, timid voice, "I sat with the little baby, Dr. Albany, until she went to sleep."

"Thank you, Josette. That was very kind of you."

That should have been the end of it. It should have ended there and have been forgotten. Or it should have had a worse ending. The child might have died. The stupid servants might have killed the child, and what a difference if Dissy had died then, things would have turned out so differently, if she had died then, then everything would have been different. For the disease affected the child's brain.

It was long after midnight when they got home. They stood before the log fire that the footman had built against their return.

"I better go and have a look at Dissy," she heard Stephen saying.

"Yes, darling, go."

She herself was filled with delicious heat and chill, her head still swimming with music and voices. The opera had been marvellous and the supper party had been a great success. On the way home they had stopped in the snow to look up at the whitened trees and houses. It had been so beautiful she had wanted to weep. "Stephen, the air is filled with stars!" She held her hands up and her face up, and the tiny points of cold brushed her cheeks.

There was no light in the room save for the fire and that of the tall white tapers in the two silver candelabras. She handed her wraps to the maid and then instinctively her hand touched her throat, the pearls warm from her skin.

"Yes, darling, go up and look at her," she whispered. She stretched out her beautiful arms in front of the fire aware that Stephen was looking at her. She walks in beauty, like the night. Of cloudless climes and starry skies, one day Stephen would know, would see, would realise; she stretched out her arms in the firelight as though to embrace those rosy hues, one day he would love.

There was a noise upstairs, a great jar from the room overhead that made the candles flicker. What a racket for fate to make in the ceiling, thumpings and runnings around! It seemed to tilt the room on its side, she saw the little ogre face of Josette transfixed in a horrible grimace. Shoutings, hollow Germanic sounds from Ursula Schmidt, "Ach mein kindelein. Wo bist du? Ach ja. Gott in Himmel . . ." horrible hysterical Teutonic noises of distress.

"My God!" Stephen started forward. Jessica quicker than he, ran to the door and threw it open on the dark hall. The great noises rushed in. "Ach Herr Doktor, comen you quick . . ."

Then scampering down the wide carpeted stairs like a little rabbit, for all the world like a little white rabbit, thump, thump, thump lightly on the carpeting, feet like paws in the Doctor Denton pajamas, "Dissa, Dissa!" Frau Schmidt screaming from the landing, then enormously descending after the little white rabbit who crouched down, her shoulders hunched up and the tiny hands in fists under her chin, turning at the bottom of the stairs

and running straight towards her mother. "Ach," bang, bang, Frau Schmidt was afraid to hurry on the stairs, such unwieldiness must be slow paced, above like a little white moon between the banisters, Maidie's pale face.

Jessica was thinking merely, this is a disgrace. She drew herself to her full height saying with cold pitched anger, "Frau Schmidt! Dissy!"

The little demented thing was making straight for her; she had seen in her childhood a rabbit coursed by dogs running that blind, helpless way, bounding headlong into every peril and hazard to escape the one pursuing. She put out her arms—to catch her, to drive her away—it was impossible to tell, the motion was completely instinctive. The child veered, ducking at the last moment and darted by her and flung herself upon her father.

Jessica stood there paralysed beside the door looking at the little trembling white figure, the brush of hair in the firelight shining like a tow, Stephen's dark head bent over it and his hands, great and pink, grasped the small shoulders. She hates me too, she thought numbly, all that was left of her, shocked wits. Dissy hates me too. Even my child hates me.

Bang, bang, bang, galumph, Frau Schmidt finally reached the bottom of the stairs, ponderously crossed the hall and pushed into the room, "Ach pardon me, bitte, ja. Das little kinderlein, she goes to sleep like an angel. Josette, she stay with her und me, wir setzen mit hir till she sleep like the angel . . ."

"Here." Stephen stripped off his suit jacket and wrapped it around the child. "Aagaggaaggaag" meaningless syllables in her ears as the governess talked to her husband. They all hate me, they ignore me as though I were a piece of wood, they all belong but I don't belong, I am a stranger and an enemy and they hate me. She shivered, the hall was cold, they had let the furnace fire go down for the night. Above, the landing and the balustrade were lighted from a fixture in the upstairs hall, and again she became aware of Maidie's little moonlike face forced between the knobby mahogany uprights.

"You go back to bed, Maidie," she said sharply. The face disappeared obediently, but she would see it a few minutes later rising sideways over the top of the railing.

"Aagaggaagaag . . ." behind her. "Sick. Vomited." Little disjointed words. "Then she sleep like the angel."

"She vehr sick, Herr Doktor?"

"I thinken she get better in sleep."

Now the woman was looking at her. Pale blue eyes in the big, coarse face pointed at her. Frau Schmidt started sobbing. Big, gulping noises, the tears spattered out of her eyes unchecked, open-mouthed weepings. "I vass thinken to call you, Herr Doktor, aber you vass'n nicht hère."

God help me if I ever hire another German, Jessica was thinking. The woman was standing between her and Stephen, she couldn't see a thing. She realised with a start that Frau Schmidt wasn't even dressed. She was in her nightgown, a voluminous grey flannel that stuck out repulsively from her worn, hastily put on bathrobe, her wispy grey hair was tied up in rags for those ugly little sausage curls she wore by day. The beaklike nose was beginning to turn red and to run, in the midst of one sob she paused to snuffle loudly. Jessica handed her a handkerchief.

Then the woman was turning and rushing forward. More crying out, more stampings. Jessica closed her eyes for an instant, the child had gone into convulsions.

They were gone. The hysterical, stamping Frau Schmidt, Stephen with the child in his arms, but as he passed her Stephen looked at her for a second, his eyes strange and hard, no words no reproach, that look, instantly withdrawn, played over her face.

She drew in her breath, *he* should have known if Dissy was so sick. How was I to know! He hates me now, but he will begin to love me, aha, I have begun to hate him and I shall hate him always and never stop for a second and inwardly she smiled, strangely exalted at the dark inferno that had smouldered so long, but now burst up within her, terrifying, overpoweringly violent, agonising and sublime.

"I had no idea she was so sick," she said slowly. "I didn't know that it was anything to worry about."

Josette still stood before her, a stiff little figure turned to stone, with wide, terrified eyes, the wraps still held tightly in her arms.

"Why didn't you tell me she was so sick. I had no way of knowing that there was anything to worry about! My God, she might have died, you stupid servants might have killed the child!"

"Why didn't you tell me! Why! Why!"

Dissy walked slowly towards town across the wide sandy flat that bordered the highway. She had discarded her coat as well as her shoes and had lost her purse. With her hair trailing down her back, her slight figure and too short dress, she looked like a half grown girl.

Old Mr. Pickett driving by in his ancient Ford thought she was one of Ted Nelson's granddaughters and wondered why she wasn't in school. Then he recalled that it was Saturday and they don't have to go to school on Saturdays. Hmmmm, he thought, she ought to be home helping her mother. He noticed the erratic uncertain course she followed over the sand and decided that she must be playing a game with herself. That age they're always full of flim flam moon castles, of course. Step on a line, break your mother's spine, step on a crack, break your mother's back. There wouldn't be any lines or cracks in that sand, of course.

The flats had once been part of the tidal basin, but had been cut off from the sea by the line of dunes and later by the highway which here was raised on a causeway of big, granite blocks, for in times of heavy rains the area was flooded. There were stones and rocks scattered over the sand and a sparse growth of hollow, drab grass; quite soon Dissy's feet were bruised and cut, but she hardly noticed it.

She looked up and saw the car going by on the road; it was rickety and noisy and left an air trail of black smoke like a train. Suddenly she waved. Mr. Pickett waved back, sure then that she

was one of Ted Nelson's girls, that oldest one, Dorothy, most probably. Well, she wasn't up to any harm out there in the flats, and in a year or two she'd be finding out that life wasn't all peaches and cream.

Dissy stood and watched the car till it was out of sight, then she followed vaguely after. She was in a wasteland littered with the anomalously indestructible discards of the latter day. Automobile tyres, coil springs, empty cans, orange peels, a stripped, rusted chassis of a car, a wagon wheel, a rubber boot, empty bottles, a cracked tin, rusty bailing wire. But this was merely the casual litter of the roadside, for the place was not officially a dump. There was some organic waste too, and these piles when Dissy drew near would be covered with an angry buzzing umbrella of flies, and the girl seeing them would be driven to turning aside.

Her way led past a number of huge billboards. The posters were brightly coloured and somewhat jocular, set obliquely to the road and designed to flash momentarily upon the motorist's vision as he sped by at fifty miles an hour. Dissy approached them at her minute walking pace; the huge, distorted human figures loomed above her interminably and somewhat frighteningly. She would try turning her head away, but the fact that they were there drew her wandering troubled gaze always back to them. As it was, she was diverted from looking further and seeing the weird, shining aluminium coloured top of the building on the other side of the road among the dunes. Gradually it fell behind her and out of sight.

The area became more thickly settled as she neared the edge of town and at the same time even more desolate, for here human habitations and work places mushroomed up among the derelicts and discards. Here were the junk yards, the dump piles and the salvage piles; paintless board fences enclosed yards littered with trash and refuse, thriftlessly saved and hoarded. Here were the small filling stations with dirty pumps that specialised apparently in second hand hub caps that were stolen from parked cars and sold back to their owners; here were the signs, "We fix flats"

and driveways scattered with nails; here were the sagging buildings for "expert body work"; car lots, diners and eateries, small and drab and dirty. Flimsy wooden dwellings appeared with clothes lines out with the fluttering burden of clothes in the bright sun; there were children playing with makeshift toys retrieved from the junk heaps, and skinny dogs that barked and cowered at a shadow. Dissy crossed the road and returned to the water's edge.

She stood there for a long while looking out on the shining opalescent water; the warm breeze blew in her face; she looked at the small waves and let the foam wash at her feet; there were pale, luminous clouds at the far horizon, they were drawn out into long, filmy strands like a cursive script on the wan sky, meaningless lettering upon the curved wall of the firmament; she looked and looked and hardly saw, for her was the vague, uncussed glance of the wandering, defeated mind. It was the stinging flies that at length made her continue up the beach.

She had left the highway about ten minutes before Marty Norman reached that end of town looking for her; he had meant to come sooner but then he had delayed talking to Steamboat whom he had met on the boardwalk. The two had passed the time of day and Steamboat mentioned that he'd heard on the radio about the escaped lunatic girl, you know the one that came in the Diner last night, I bet that she's the one.

I wouldn't know, said Marty, and Steamboat could tell from his manner that Marty had seen the girl again. Steamboat shrugged and warned him, well everybody's looking for her now, so if you see her, pass the word. Marty had gone down the beach and then cut back to the highway where he stood briefly looking around. He found a perfectly good beer can opener at the roadside, picked it up and slipped it in his pocket. Then he turned vaguely back into town, thinking of some other business.

There were some hardy little children playing on the beach who apparently didn't mind the flies, or perhaps they moved about too quickly to attract the logy insects. Two older boys and two younger boys and a girl of about seven were building an

ambitious monument in the wet sand. One of the older boys was the engineer and architect and he set the little girl to finding sticks and sea shells to fortify the wall which enclosed a round area of about seven feet across. Inside were dromedary humps and mounds, streets laid out, archways made from paper boxes. Also two of the boys were busy with excavations for a pond inside and a channel out to the waves.

Dissy stood and watched and finally one of the boys (he wasn't fooled for a minute into thinking she wasn't a grown up lady) said, "It's the fair grounds, Miss."

"I'm getting the lights for the fairway," said the little girl.

"No, you're not," said one of the younger boys.

"I am too, the shells are lights."

"They're bricks."

"They're lights and bricks," said the older boy pacifically.

"See, he said they were lights."

"He said they were bricks too."

Dissy stared at the little girl. Her face was marked with a big sore, half healed over, a red scab, three parallel lines that extended from her cheek bone to her chin. It was the kind of mark that it is the lot of an active child often to bear. It heals up and is gone quickly and the child is hardly aware of it except at the moment it happens.

But Dissy looked at the little girl with horror.

"They're really lights," said the child.

"They're bricks."

"Some of them are lights and some of them are bricks," said the older boy.

"This one's a light." She held up a shell. Dissy knelt and extended her hand and the child put the shell on her palm.

"You can see it's a light, can't you, lady?"

"It's a brick," from the other.

Dissy stared and stared at the mark on the girl's face, and then down at the shell. She smiled helplessly.

It was enough for the little girl. "See, the lady says it's a light."

She snatched back her shell. Dissy still smiling got to her feet then she patted the girls' cheek. A second later the child ran down the beach looking for other shells.

Dissy looked after the child and then at her own hand that had touched her face; suddenly tears filled her eyes.

"It's a brick," chanted the little boy.

"It's a light," called the girl over her shoulder.

Dissy drifted aimlessly on; a little breeze had sprung up and blew her hair forward over her face; from time to time she lifted her hand and raked it back. The children's voices followed her, brought by the same wind, they hardly diminished as she drew away.

"They're bricks for the fence."

"They're lights for the fairway and the roller coaster and the ferris wheel and the merry-go-round."

"We need thousands of bricks for the wall."

"We need millions of lights for the merry-go-round."

But at last Dissy had gone so far that the children's cries were indistinct and wordless like the creaking sounds of the gulls. There was a great flock of these birds flying low, alighting and taking off from the wooden pier that Dissy now approached. They were bold and arrogant and they turned their one-eyed, predatory looks upon the girl who walked so slowly by. She passed between the grey elephant leg piles, stained by the tides and incredibly rotted, but sound enough to support the planking above her head; the sunshine was reflected up from the waves in an uncanny, dim flickering; the logs whined and groaned with the water's motion; she trod on sand that was damp and cold and strewn with salvages; all about her the birds flapped and shrieked.

She came out the other side with her head bowed; the changeable wind blew in her face; flattened her leaf-green skirt against her body; she plucked nervously at her collar and spoke aloud words that were swept from her mouth by the whirligig breeze.

Now she began to hurry. Often she looked fearfully over her shoulder as if someone followed, she cast frightened glances ahead

and at each side. A dog bounding along playfully in the loose sand near the boardwalk made her freeze with terror, but someone whistled to the dog and the dog went. Dissy ran on.

Some men were lounging on the boardwalk; they leaned with their elbows on the rail smoking cigarettes and slapping indolently at the flies. When they saw Dissy they started to whistle and one of them called out, "What's the hurry, Sister? Don't you know there's a speed limit on how fast you walk on this here beach?" Dissy gave him one frantic, panic stricken look and ran on.

"Hey! Hey you in that green dress!"

Dissy was stopped in her tracks. A man had drawn a rowboat up on the beach and he was busy with hammer and nails patching the broken cross seat. Dissy had almost run full tilt against the boat.

"Oh."

The man smiled at her, "Better look out where you're going."

She stared at him and then down at her dress. "It's green," she muttered almost inaudibly; her face twitched convulsively then she turned and ran up the steps to the boardwalk. The man looked after her for a moment shaking his head.

At the top of the steps there was a woman standing aside to let Dissy pass. She was middle-aged with a slack, kindly face; she held an open bottle of Coca Cola in each hand, apparently she was going down to the man with the rowboat on the beach.

Dissy stopped in front of her and leaned forward. "This isn't my dress," she explained to the astonished woman. "I don't know how it got in my closet. I don't even own a green dress."

"What?"

"I mean it must be somebody else's."

"Well, it fits you good, honey," said the woman.

"No . . . well . . . oh . . ."

She walked on, but more slowly for she was too winded to run. To her left now rose the towering, gaudy structures of the amusement park. The tattered posters on the fence fluttered in the wind where they had come loose. "Swim in the biggest swim-

ming pool in the world" was spelled out in gigantic lettering. The wind roared in the cables that hung down from the "parachute jump"; the fretwork supports of the roller coaster painted with orange lead gleamed in the sunshine.

Dissy began to smile. She sought and found the side gate that had been left unlocked. She pushed it open unobserved and slipped inside.

The clouds came up suddenly, and the sky had been clear and mild; the wind sprang up, free, uncertain of its quarter, warm breezes laced with the smell of flowers and grass and of rain and brimstone, heralds of the storm as the turbulent, manteling cover of shadowing clouds advanced, floating like curds on the milky whey of air. Icy blasts blacksnake over the littoral plain; the ocean smokes and tall waves ride up on the shore and dust and sand rise from the dark earth to form the instant shapes of poor harried wandering ghosts.

Mrs. Albany sits in her chair, Mrs. Tandy labours behind pushing it up the bumpy, rutted road that leads to the highway. Mrs. Albany clings with white hands to the arms of her chair to ease the jolts, she is clad in black oilskins, an ancient southwester clapped on her head. Mrs. Tandy is swollen to twice her size in the wind, it bellies out her jacket and billows her skirt, flaps the scarf that is tied under her chin.

The road is hardly more than a car track with a washboard top between the grooves. It skirts the beach for a quarter of a mile then cuts back to the highway. It's longer around than the path through the dunes to the boardwalk by almost a mile but the chair would surely founder in the soft sand, as it is, Mrs. Tandy strains and pushes with all her might to accomplish a creeping advance.

She stops to rest and catch her breath, they've gone barely two hundred yards and they're still beside the fence that marks the boundary of Mrs. Albany's property. Hardly a fence any more,

but a row of posts strung with tattered, broken wire that sag inwards from the constant sea winds.

"It's a blessing, Missus, that the rain holds off."

(It's hard to find blessings in a world that's chuck full of craziness and sin and black clouds and stubborn old ladies, and what does the Good Lord think He's doing sending a poor old woman so many misfortunes right on top of each other.)

"Yessiree, Missus, we can thank God for it that it's not coming down right now like cats and dogs."

"Yes, yes, Annie. Catch your breath as fast as you can."

"Yes, Missus, I'm doing that."

Mrs. Albany clings with both hands to her hat. This fantastic object Mrs. Tandy had produced with a shamed face (originally it was John Everett's) when it became evident as they left the shelter of the house that no umbrella could ever be held in the wind. "Wear it, Missus, the wind and the rain are no respecters of white hair, you know."

"You're right about that, Annie." For then they had returned to the lee of the house, but even there the cross currents of air blew in her face, prickly and sharp with spray and sand. When Mrs. Tandy went indoors to fetch the hat, Mrs. Albany craned forward to look towards the empty dunes. The lightning flashed and she flinched and muttered into the wind, imprecations and hopeless prayer.

Ten feet from her in the window the police dogs whined and yelped. The third dog, Pinkie, had run away. Nobody knew how she had got out, the wind must have blown the door open for she had disappeared.

"But she'll come back, Annie."

"Yes, that good-for-nothing'll be sure and come back."

"She's good-for-nothing, she'll come back."

But Mrs. Albany had not had proper time to worry. She was busy then getting ready to go out and the telephone was ringing. "Annie, Annie, answer the phone. What is it? Have they found her, have they found my little daughter!"

"No, Missus, not yet, but they're looking for her; everybodys' looking."

"But they haven't found her yet?"

"No, Missus, not yet. But they know she's in town and they almost know where she is. They'll find her by and by, everybody's looking."

"Then I must go there, Annie. You and I will go."

"No, Missus, it's better we bide here."

"Annie, we must, we must. Tell them we must. Tell them I am coming."

Must, needs must, must go. This necessity had been with her when she awakened. The child might have died, but she had not died. Of course, I must go to her. She had shouted, "Mrs. Tandy, Mrs. Tandy. Help me, help me, hurry, I must go to her."

"Missus, no, Missus."

"Must, we must, I tell you." Affirming this necessity in a loud voice that echoed in this round room peculiarly because the piles of displaced furniture muffled some of the sound or gave it back more quickly than a farther wall. *Must* loud in the room.

"Missus, when you were asleep I called them. And they're looking for her, right now, they're looking for her."

"And we must look too, Annie. Hurry, Annie, get me ready!"

Must, demanding as old women are demanding, yet the strength of must is irresistible, communicates itself from one to another; Mrs. Albany claimed this strength and she who was so weak before was strong as a tiger.

"Hurry, Mrs. Tandy, there isn't much time."

"But, Missus!"

"I say . . . we must hurry, Mrs. Tandy. There isn't any time."

Mrs. Tandy loomed over her, that face kindly and wrinkled and yearning, reddened and fiery as a cook's over a pot, a huge face with fattened jowls and chins to go with the enormous body that it topped. She used stratagem in her urgings.

"Missus, the little dog Pinkie, she ran away. I was meaning to tell you."

"Annie there's no time to be worrying about a dog. I'll wear that dress that I wore yesterday. It's on top but get me a sweater and my coat. Hurry, Annie, I tell you we must hurry."

"Missus . . . supposin' you meet Mr. David, Missus. You might meet him again, Missus, if you go out."

Mrs. Albany frowned and her eyes fluttered, she passed her hand over her brow and her mouth hardened, "If I meet him, I must."

For she still thought as she had thought that she had seen a murderer's face, she still feared as she had feared, as she turned the chair around and manoeuvred it towards her clothes, sweat and chills shook her, but anguish must have time for its harrowing and there was no time, there was merely space and motion and commotion, and "Hurry Annie, there's hardly any time."

The wind was blowing in the chimney and the police dogs bounded by her side. Pookie had run away through the door, but she'd come back, of course, there wasn't any time to worry about a dog.

Deep within her was the cry (*Mother, Mother, Mother*). She must rise to it and take her place in the human race, mothers and daughters and granddaughters bound together by love and obligation and mutuality. Earlier she had not heeded *Mother, Mother, Mother* as she had never heeded any cry. (The crookedness of her actions testified amendment, surely it was amendment). (*Mother, I've come home*). All the crying out that a heedless life had silenced by ignoring echoed in the utmost corridors, twittering and gibberings, fear and apprehension are meaningless in the face of such necessity, and there was no time.

"Really, Mrs. Tandy, do hurry, you must hurry, there is so little time that we must hurry and get ready."

Swept along without one moment for thinking. There was too much to do, too much hurrying, for Mrs. Tandy was as slow as a snail. "Mrs. Tandy, Mrs. Tandy, bring me my woollen stockings, they're in the bottom drawer there. Please, do you hear what I'm saying!"

Her excitement made the dogs leap around and bark, the two police dogs, that is, Pinkie had sneaked off. A door must have blown open in the wind. Well there wasn't any time to be worrying about a dog. "Mrs. Tandy, what are you doing now, I asked you to get my stockings. Oh, oh!"

Mrs. Tandy was slow and unwilling, "It's bad out, Missus, the weather's turned bad, you can't be gallivanting around."

Mrs. Albany snatched the rolled up stockings out of Mrs. Tandy's hand and fiercely sent her back to the bureau for garters and pins. At best the process of dressing for her was long drawn out.

Two bright spots appeared on her cheeks and her eyes glittered feverishly above them, Mrs. Tandy shook her head at this delirium, but what's to be done with an old woman who's so stiff necked and stubborn. She disapproved but she couldn't but take a kind of grudging pride in the wilfulness of her mistress; her disapproval made her slow and fumbling and Mrs. Albany shouted at her imprecations and injunctions.

"Oh, to be surrounded by deaf people and idiots and fools. Not *that* sweater, Annie. I *told* you the blue one."

"Annie, I was thinking, you tie up Shep and Spot on their chains and leave a door open so if Pinkie comes back she can get in if she wants . . . Ahhh, help me with this button, Annie!"

All the while reënacting itself before her eyes, the young girl stepping in from the gracious morning, "Mother, I've come home."

The lamps and their cords were still strung about the room but only a few were lighted. She squinted her eyes and she could see these lights dim and brown against the onrush of dazzling daylight, the odour of sea and salt was with her and that tall, slim figure stood at the door, arms held out.

But all the dogs were barking and the parrot was screaming. She said they would go and live in a white house on a hill and there would be trees. Then she had stolen some money and she had run away. Mrs. Albany rubbed her cheeks with her hands.

No, everything was mixed up. I'm sorry Dissy, I'm all mixed up. You understand that. I know you understand. I'll explain to you how it was. I never knew you were sick. I didn't know. I didn't know. Mrs. Tandy was coming towards her with the bluesweater. "You see, Annie, we'll go and find her and she'll come back."

At last she was dressed and ready. Mrs. Tandy trundled her out the back door and around the house in her wheelchair. The wind struck at them, wet and freezing with a scattered shower of rain.

"Missus, we'll never in the world be able to keep an umbrella up in this storm. Missus, I got an old hat, it's funny looking and all, it used to be John Everett's, only it'll keep your head dry, Missus. Please, I wish you'd let me get it for you."

"Sure, Annie, yes, get it for me."

"The wind and the rain are no respecters of white hair, you know."

"You're right about that, Annie."

The police dogs were whining and barking at the window. Pinkie was outside somewhere. She had slipped out but there hadn't been any time to look for her. Mrs. Albany peered between the lattice work under the porch in case the little dog was there.

Mrs. Tandy came back with the hat—it was a dreadful old object with a sweat stained lining and white markings of salt on the rubber. Mrs. Albany put it on and it slipped down over her forehead. "There," she said, "Annie, that'll keep me dry."

"Maybe it'll help, Missus."

"Don't you worry, Annie." They proceeded slowly down the bumpy path to the gate. They felt the full force of the wind now and Mrs. Albany shouted to Mrs. Tandy to make herself heard.

"Annie, did you remember to tie up the dogs and leave a door open for Pinkie?"

"Yes, Missus, that's what I did."

"And keep an eye out for her as we're going along. If we see her we can call her."

"Yes, Missus."

They stopped near the corner of her property and Annie rested then they went on, but they stopped twice more before they got to the highway.

"What time is it, Annie?"

"It's four or four thirty, Missus."

"It's dark for that."

"Yes, Missus, it's the clouds make it dark."

It was easier going on the highway. There was hardly any traffic and Mrs. Tandy pushed the chair along on the pavement. Twice they left the road to let cars pass and a third time for the bus. The heavy vehicle came slowly, its lights on in the murk. The engine roars and the wind blows a dusty sheet over the headlights. Mrs. Tandy pushes the chair onto the gravelly shoulder.

"Mrs. Tandy, Mrs. Tandy!"

"Yes, Missus."

"Look at that in the grass that's shining. Is it Pinkie crouched down in the grass, do you think?"

"No, Missus, it's a can or a bottle."

"I hope it's a can or a bottle."

"Surely, it is. See, the lights go by and the shining stops."

"You're right Annie, the shining stopped."

The headlights blinded them. The engine roared and smelled, wafted out a great hot breath of exhaust and gasoline. Then the lights went out as the bus came broadside and passed beyond.

The headlights played upon the two women beside the road, two black shapes with startling white faces and eyes blinking helplessly in the glare, the smaller one seated, dressed preposterously in black oilskins with a southwestern wry on her head, raising one hand against the light. The people in the bus could see it bony and bleached as the hand of a skeleton, then the image was gone as the headlights passed on and the bus picked up speed to charge up the hill as far as it could before it was necessary to change gears.

"I was worried, Annie, that it was Pinkie, and she might run in front of the bus."

.. "It was only a can, Missus, or a bottle."

As they came into town there was a rift in the clouds and the sunlight filtered through momentarily, yellowing the dusty air. The street stretched before them broad and mathematically straight cutting through a nightmare dream landscape of crowded, dilapidated buildings and cluttered yards, at the end of the street, dully red and orange and green, rose the bleak, incredible profile of the amusement park. Whirligigs of sand preceded them up the street, the pale, gritty dust blown up from the gutters into the corporal form of hurrying ghosts.

The main gate of the park was open and the police cars were parked in front, a little crowd milled around them. Jack Tandy was there, and without a word he took his mother's place behind the chair, the three went in.

They skirted the "biggest swimming pool in the world," they went by the bath houses; to their right was the ferris wheel, creaking in the wind, to the left the merry-go-round with its canvas shrouded figures. The barnlike structure that contained the bumping cars was locked up tight. They crossed the sandy plaza and passed under the orange metal fretwork of the roller coaster.

The Aisle of Fun lay ahead under its mildewed arch. They passed the peeling white domes of igloos and stucco minarets pitted with windblown sand, bending, plywood turrets. Boards of knotty pine were carelessly nailed over the fronts of the stands. A dead gull lay on its side in front of a timbered Alpine cottage; as they passed by, the last of the flies flew logily up and the wind swept them away. Directly ahead was a pink stucco building with Spanish arches and a flat roof. The sign over its door proclaimed it to be the Hall of Mirrors. Unlike the other buildings on the Aisle of Fun, this one was not boarded up. Its door stood open to show a billowing painted drop of a Madame de Pompadour peering into a glass. From within came the sound of voices.

Marty Noman had bummed a cigarette off Ozzie Laudermann.

He didn't smoke it right away, rather he walked up the street holding it in his hand, putting off the pleasure of lighting it as long as he could. However, all the while he rummaged in his pockets with his free hand looking for matches. Thus he found the beer can opener again which gave him an idea.

He was standing opposite O'Hara's Bar and Grill. The gold lettering on the plate glass window went up in a hump over the picture of an American eagle also etched on the glass. Marty Noman looked slowly from the cigarette to the beer can opener to the gold legend and then beyond it into the dim room where the pale bartender moved slowly around polishing glasses and filling the baskets with pretzels. No customers had showed up as yet.

Marty Noman went in diffidently, moved up to the bar with a sidling, wheedling gait and laid the unlighted cigarette on the counter.

"Hi, Jerry."

"Hi."

Neither of the men looked at the other. The bartender stared out the window and Marty looked at his cigarette. There was a long silence.

"Say Jerry!"

"Yeah?" The bartender's pale bland face was wary as well as kindly. He never took his eyes from the window.

"Could you give me a light, Jerry, for my cigarette, huh?"

Jerry backed down the counter to where he kept a box of kitchen matches, he took out a handful and dropped them in front of Marty Noman. He, with considerable care, picked one out—one with an extra gob of phosphorus on its head, then pressing his thumb nail hard against it made it light.

"You wanna cigarette, Jerry?" (Marty held out the flame while prudently keeping back his single cigarette.)

"Nope, I never touch 'em."

Jerry watched the other light his cigarette, then commented, "They're coffin nails. If ya wanna poison yourself, go ahead, that's what I tell folks, only nope, not for me."

Marty Noman using his big, bell-like sleeve for cover slipped the beer can opener up on the counter, he waited for Jerry to finish talking, then he lifted his hand like a conjuror and revealed the opener.

"Lookit, what I found just now, Jerry."

"Whassat?"

"It's a beer can opener,"

Jerry looked at it carefully, then laid it down. "That's the kind they give away at all the delicatessens."

Marty looked at it. "It's like those kind, sorta, only this one has a lotta copper in it. See, it's copper coloured."

"Yeah, I guess it's made out of copper."

"And the hook for opening bottles is underneath and not on the side."

"Lot of them are like that."

"I haven't ever seen one like that before."

"Look, you can get 'em at any delicatessen."

"I'll bet this is better than the other kind."

"They're all about the same."

"Lookit, Jerry, gimme one of those bottles and I'll show you how it works." Marty pointed at the bottles of beer lined up in the cooler at the far end.

Jerry looked pleased that his wariness had been justified. He put his hands on his hips. "Look, Marty, I tell you they all work alike."

Marty hunched over the counter, he pulled his hat down on his forehead, "I thought maybe you'd be interested in seein' how *this* one works." Suddenly he looked up and winked.

"Okay, okay." Jerry gave a sigh of mock exasperation. He fetched two bottles of beer, but as he set them down in front of Marty he warned, "Now understand, one of these is for me, hear!"

"Sho, sho, acourse, Jerry, I wouldn't wanna drink all by myself, lookit, this first one I open that's for you."

Jerry sat down on his high stool behind the counter. They both sipped at their beer in silence.

"Well, what's new?" Jerry asked finally.

Marty carefully put out his half smoked cigarette and put the butt in his pocket. He rubbed his nose, "Nothing special."

"Hot today."

"Yeah, it's hot."

"I had some ice out in back and it all melted. It's that hot."

"There's gonna be a storm."

"Yeah, probly."

"There are clouds now, but I said so this morning when there weren't."

"Yeah, you can always be sure when the weather's nice that pretty soon it won't be."

"It's still hot though."

"It's unhealthy when it's hot like this."

"Huh?"

"I mean you sweat and get overheated, then when it cools off you get a chill. You can catch your death like that. Last time we had a warm spell like this, this left nostril of mine started running and it wouldn't stop for six weeks."

"Yeah, hot weather makes some people sick."

"And the flies are pretty awful today too."

"Yeah, they sting."

"I been putting spray on them all day, but you know what I think? They're getting immune to all these poisons we put on them. It knocks them out for a while and you think they're dead, then it turns out that they were just sleeping."

"Well, a person can get used to flies."

"Yeah, we can."

They were both silent now and Jerry turned around lazily and switched on the radio. It was the tail end of the news cast. Marty pricked up his ears.

"Police in five states are still on the lookout for the inmate who escaped late yesterday from the Sunnyside Hospital for the Mentally Ill. She is twenty-six-year-old Eurydice Albany, who last seen was wearing a brown coat, green dress, brown shoes. Asy-

lum officials warn she may be dangerous. Persons with any information of her whereabouts are urged to get in touch with the authorities immediately . . ."

The announcer's voice was smooth and perfectly modulated, he went on to wind up the broadcast with the story of a Mr. and Mrs. Hawkshaw who were celebrating their diamond and one (seventy-six years) wedding anniversary; the secret of a happy marriage, Mrs. Hawkshaw was quoted as saying was, "You have to like a man as well as love him."

Marty Noman wedged his finger under his tied down hat and scratched.

"It's funny," he remarked noncommittally.

"Yeah," said the bartender tentatively.

"I mean about the crazy girl."

"Yeah, she's supposed to be around here. I mean Jack Tandy told me. His mother works for that Mrs. Albany. He came by telling me about her, Mrs. Albany, I mean, she thought she was gonna be murdered last night and now this crazy daughter of hers has showed up. Jack's ma finally phoned and told him, and now everybody's out looking for her."

"Oh." There was an inch of beer left in the bottle, Marty Noman shook it up into suds, deliberately broke the bubble that formed over the top. "Well." There was a silence from the other, not uncomfortable or strained, but merely passive and waiting.

"Well," Marty Noman spoke more strongly. "I guess I gotta be going along now. Down the road, so to speak." He gathered up the unused matches thriftily and stowed them about in different pockets. "Say, how'd you like to have the bottle opener?"

"Nope, thanks."

"I guess you got plenty."

"Yeah, I seem to have enough round here."

"Yeah, I guess you would."

"Well, thanks, though."

"Well, see you around."

Marty made a fussy exit, turning back to repeat, "Yeah, see you around and say, thanks for the beer."

"Ya, ya, see ya."

"Ya, see ya."

Marty stood uncertainly on the boardwalk, his bright coat billowed about him like a weather sock in the wayward wind. He walked perhaps a hundred yards down the walk, then he reversed himself and walked swiftly back. He passed O'Hara's Bar and Grill, made for a stairway that went down to the beach.

Down at the water's edge he stopped to talk with Charlie Woerner who had just finished replacing the last broken seat in his rowboat. The new wood looked clean and fleshy orange against the grey weathered boards of the boat.

"That'll hold until the rest of her falls apart, anyways," said Charlie.

Mrs. Woerner came heavily over the sand with the four cents deposit she'd got back on her bottles. She was looking up at the sky. "I don't guess, Charlie, we better try going out now, it looks like it's fixing for a storm."

Charlie Woerner looked up at the sky, "Looks like you're right," he agreed, "I don't guess we better." He turned to Marty. "You know, this morning I looked out and it looked like just the kind of a day for going out for a ride in this here rowboat, and I was gonna take the missus."

Mrs. Woerner climbed into the beached boat and sat on the new seat.

"You did a real good job, anyway, home."

"I coulda told you there was a storm coming," said Marty.

"Well, they'll be other days coming," said Mrs. Woerner.

Charlie climbed into the boat beside his wife. "That's right, baby."

Marty continued on up the beach. He cut out and waded into the surf skirting the inlet channel of the "biggest swimming pool in the world." The water rushed in and he followed its course with his eyes, suddenly certain where he must go.

Once inside the fair grounds he had no difficulty in finding Dissy. As he knew well, only a few of the buildings had not been boarded up, the remainder mostly were well locked, the rule of elimination left but one or two hiding places in this desert area of amusement. The wind-driven sand blew freely over the wide acres; the steel supports of the roller coaster went nakedly into the ground, the kiosk beside its starting point was gated and barred; the parachute jump rose like an umbrella on a narrow steel filigree base; the ferris wheel, groaning in the wind, was held to the earth by a fretted scaffolding. There was no hiding place.

The wind and the day and the sand are unnumbered. There are clouds in the sky, black and grey and white and in a rift the sun strikes a gleaming saffron on the cloaked heavens. Directly above through a small, drifting break is the remaining, distant, celestial blue and beyond.

The Aisle of Fun, of course, is the only place and at the end of this blind alley the pink stucco marvel, "The Hall of Mirrors" with its doors inadvertently left open, or worried open by rats or the wind or homeless ones who seek shelter here, standing open, whatever the reason on the street of igloos and castles and minarets.

The light comes in through skylights in the flat roof and as the sun emerges it is brilliant here. Beyond the curtain at the entrance way is a series of little rooms, one gives directly upon another leading around concentric squares that become successively smaller until the ultimate centre of the building is reached.

Dissy had discarded the green dress that had betrayed her fancy and bundled it into the corner of the first room; she had covered it up so that none of the green showed with her undergarments. Then she had gone deeper and deeper into this brilliant maze to reach the final room. There she knelt on the floor.

The mirrors that gave the Hall of Mirrors its name were not true mirrors. There was one in every room and each one held a different image.

In the first room the viewer saw himself as normal enough, flattered perhaps in a dark mirror that presented no comment other than that the surface was somewhat speckled and soiled.

In the mirror in the second room the image is distorted to tallness and narrowness, the short man sees himself seven feet high and the fat wife beside him, a slender Amazon. In the third room all is width. An inch at the waist is a foot, the narrow neck a pillar, pursed lips a grin, and the ears like saucers fly out from the head.

The mirror of the fourth room images all men with pin heads and feet the size of watermelons. In the fifth the head and neck and bosom are generously granted enormous size on stems like hairbells. In the sixth an extra mirror provides a view of the hinderparts blown up like balloons in a mirror that otherwise is honest enough.

In the seventh, arms and legs are trickily detached from the body, or if one moves, it's the head or the body itself that suffers severance.

Swellings and reddened sores afflict the viewer in the next room; then he is given a mortal pallor. In one room all he can see is his eye turned upside down and magnified, in the next his hands, enormous and dripping as a murderer's. Three rooms in succession let him see his face with his features distorted and contorted.

In the next, he is reduced to miniature, one thousand times in one thousand mirrors, his figure is six inches high and wherever he looks this tiny image apes him. This is the final room, walls and floor and part of the ceilings are crowded with these thousand mirrors and each one in its depths reflects the multiplied thousands of miniscule images in all the rest.

Dissy crouched with her knees bent under her, her forehead touching the floor as in some medieval eastern obeisance. Under her face and darkened by her shadow, a tiny face like hers, bent up to hers. She closed her eyes and covered her head with her arms.

When Marty Newman took her hands and gently lifted her to her feet. Then he took the coat and gave it to her.

She had been crying and her face was streaked with tears and grime.

"It wasn't my dress and I couldn't wear it any more."

"No, of course not," he answered soberly

"Where are we going now?"

She held out her arms and the coat fell open in front. She looked down helpless to remedy it, he fastened the buttons for her and she submitted like a child.

"Wherever you want, Miss "

"Will you come too?"

"Yes, Miss "

"Wherever I go?"

"Yes, Miss."

"Always and always?"

"Yes, Miss."

She looked at him. He was an oddly humble, wizened, brown figure without his bright coat. She moved close to him and took his arm and held it tightly in both her hands. They could hear other people walking and talking in the passage way, but neither of them turned to listen.

"Look," she said, and laughed suddenly and pointed. "There are thousands and thousands of us together."

